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["IT'S MY DUTY TO TELL THE MASTER THE ARTIST CHAP HAS BEEN HANGING ABOUT, MAKING LOVE IN HIS ABSENCE."]

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

CHAPTER X.

"ONE THING IS QUITE CERTAIN, WE MUST BE MARRIED TO-MORROW."

GUY FORRESTER let May's feeling expend itself somewhat before he spoke to her again, sitting by her side for a time in silence; after which, he arose and punted the boat slowly along; the even motion, and the passing breeze, gradually lulling her mental pain.

Then she raised her eyes and looked up at him, and the thought rushed through her mind how handsome he looked as he quietly and gracefully used the pole.

"Guy," she said, after a slight pause, "I want to talk to you. Will you come and sit beside me?"

In a moment the pole was stuck into the mud beneath the sparkling water, and the punt tied to it; and the artist slipped readily into the place she had made for him by her side upon the soft cushion.

"And now," she said, "for a long confab. Guy, I want you to find out from Lord Rangor what fault my father had to find with my mother. My dear, I must find her, and if it be possible, I want to reconcile them. Do you think I shall succeed?"

"You might as well try to amalgamate oil and water, May," he replied, quite earnestly. "You are only laying up for yourself trouble in making such mental plans. Sir Roger had no real quarrel with his wife. It would have been far better if he had in truth done so; then there would have been something to make up.

"*Amantium tre amoris integratio est;*" the quarrels of lovers are often, indeed, the renewals of love; but the constant mal-assimilation and jarring of two discordant natures will absolutely wear out even love itself; and for such much-to-be-pitied pairs there is but one remedy—separation!

"Neither your father nor your mother would thank you in the least for bringing them together again, and in your place I should put all thought of such an attempt out of your mind at once.

"You are too young and too beautiful to go wandering about the world in search of a mother, especially as you have no idea whatever where to look for her; and I am more than certain that if Sir Roger knows, he will never lift one finger to help you; nay, more, he would be simply furious with you for making the attempt to find her."

"I am sorry you think that, Guy," she replied, decidedly, "for I want you to help me. When we are married," she added, with a blush, "we could look for her together."

He was very nearly laughing at her idea, but the extreme earnestness of the face turned up to his silenced his levity.

He certainly did not intend to get himself in any trouble with Sir Roger by hunting up his discarded wife, however good and perfect she might be; but he saw this was not the time to say so with impunity to May. And since untruth was quite as easy to him as veracity, he assumed his most open and genuine manner; and placing his arm about her he looked down tenderly into her forget-me-not eyes, and answered without the faintest hesitation,—

"My sweet one, your wishes shall be my law. One part of the world will suit me just as well as another if only my Hawthorn will bloom there. We can wander about if you will, and search for Lady Dalkeith while I make my sketches; but if I were you, little one, I should not mention your intention to your father, for he would, I am sure, resent it. But when once we are married we can do just as we like, you see, and what we should like would be what pleased you best; so that, my nonne, you will no doubt have your own way in everything. There will be no oil and water between us—eh! Hawthorn? We shall get along as smoothly as greased wheels in one axle."

"That is not an artistic simile," she laughed, merrily. "Gay, I should have expected something more euphonious from the painter of that picture;" and her eyes rested upon her mother's exquisite face, executed with such masterly skill.

"One must lay aside the brush sometimes," he said, chiming in brightly, "and if not artistic, it is a good one. I could not find a better; and May, do you not think it would be best to risk no refusal? Would it not be better if we got married first, and asked your father's consent afterwards? You see, darling, he may have other views for you. He may desire a man of title and higher status for your husband. He may look for great wealth in your suitor, and I have neither title nor wealth, you see, only the untarnished pedigree of a country gentleman, whose family has existed long enough to have expended its wealth, and the talent by which I hope to earn fame and fortune by-and-by to add to my name; but this may not satisfy Sir Roger Dalkeith."

"It will satisfy me, Gay," she answered, very softly, slipping her hand into his confidently. "I have no desire whatever for title or money."

Gay could not echo her sentiments. He was most desirous of being rich without trouble. He wished art to be more a pastime than a mode of living. He well knew how it crippled an artist to be obliged to paint pictures to sell at any price to keep the pot of existence boiling, and was fully aware that a rich man was far more likely to paint such pictures as would raise him to the highest pitch of popularity.

May was looking at him in a dreamy far-off fashion of her own. Her colour had deepened a little at his suggestion of an immediate marriage, but she had shown no other sign of emotion, and the fact nettled him; and there came before his mental retina another face with two wonderful clear dark eyes raised to his, as bright as stars in the heavens on a summer night, and once more he could feel in imagination the pressure of her clinging arms, as they were clasped about his neck.

He could see the beautiful face soften, and the light of love deepen upon it, and the remembrance of that summer night stirred the pulses which had so long been cold and quiet and still as the grave.

No; May Dalkeith could never love as the gipsy had done. She would be a wife to be proud of! Rich and handsome, and no doubt loving too; but the passionate depth of feeling which had been so great a charm to him once in the dark-eyed beauty was certainly lacking in Sir Roger's daughter.

For a moment his face became as reflective and dreamy as her own. His mind was filled with an impatient desire to obtain from May such a love as he had once called forth from a trusting woman's heart.

He wanted warmth and colouring. His nature called for it. A quiet calm love was an irritating experience to Guy Forrester. He required reciprocity and passion, and considered life a very tame thing without it; and for one moment, as he looked at the sweet, refined face before him, he felt inclined to pack up his easel and go away; but there was something tenacious in Guy Forrester's

character. Once he had made up his mind to do a thing, he usually did it, whatever the difficulties in the way; in fact the more there were, the better it pleased him to overcome them. Smooth ground was not at all to his taste in the race for love.

He preferred a rough country, even though he got a few falls; and the truth was, that there had not been obstacles enough in his way in wooing May Dalkeith, or he would have valued her more. However, she was worth winning; he was well aware, or Lord Rangor would never have mentioned her as he had done; and he put the feelings which for the moment had held him bound, aside, and once more made the proposal he had done before in a warmer form.

"May," he said, "if I were to go to your father and he refused to let me marry you what should we do? It would be a difficult thing to disobey him, would it not?"

"Very difficult," she acknowledged. "May, if he said 'no,' would you give me up?" he inquired earnestly, and let his eyes rest upon her with an impelling power.

Her bosom stirred with agitation, and he smiled as he drew her close to him, and let his warm breath fan her cheek. He was pleased to find that he could arouse her deeper feelings, and his own pulses throbbled.

"Answer me, dear love," he whispered. "Would you give me up?" and his arm tightened around her as he spoke, and his lips were close to hers.

"No, Guy; I couldn't," she replied very softly, and the lips met again in a passionate kiss.

"Then that is settled, little Hawthorn, is it not? We must not risk a refusal. Those who know Sir Roger will inform me that his 'no,' once given, would be irrevocable; and that after it we should never get his consent; but, dear girl, your father is a proud man, and he will not like the world to say that his daughter has made a runaway match; so if once he finds that we are united, and that it is beyond his power to undo the knot, he will have the sense to accept the fact, and make the best of it."

"You see he has no one but you in all the world to care for, May, and it is not likely that he will turn to strangers now. In truth, he has so separated himself from the world that he really has no one else to turn to; and I should not be surprised if he wants us to make our home at St. Ormo, May, and I should not object to do so when London is dull. The country about here is fit for the canvas of any artist."

"But you forget, Guy, that we are going to look for my mother," she said, a little reproachfully.

He had forgotten, but he did not acknowledge it.

"Not at all, darling," he replied; "but it would neither be right nor wise to quite neglect the father who has brought you up."

"No; I suppose not. You are right, Guy. I will try and do my duty to both my parents."

"And to your husband also, Hawthorn," he added tenderly, while she wound her arm about his neck and kissed him.

"When shall it be, little one?" he whispered low.

"Oh! how can I decide! I do not know," she replied, somewhat helplessly, shrinking back.

"We must form our plans, sweetheart," he said softly. "Your father might return home at any moment, you know; and then what opportunity should we have to make arrangements? He would be sure to hear of our meetings, and would keep his eyes on you, you may be quite certain."

"Do you really think any one would be so unkind as to tell him?" she asked anxiously.

"Undoubtedly he will hear of our acquaintance, my darling; and my little pet will not be afraid if she has her old Guy to take care of her, will she?" he asked tenderly. "I won't leave my little love to brave his

wrath alone, don't fear, Hawthorn, dearest," he ended in dulcet accents.

The words sounded sweet to her ears; she did not listen to see whether they rang true or no. She was satisfied; her lover would stand between her and her stern father's anger if he should be wrath with her; and she clung to him as though that wrath had already begun. But women are prone to hesitate on the brink ere they make up their minds to take any fatal plunge; and May was no bolder than the rest of her sex.

"Oh Gay! I don't know what to say, what to do," she answered, nervously; "for I didn't tell you before, because I wanted to have a bright and happy day with you, but it is needless you should know it. Papa will be home to-morrow night, and I am so dreadfully sorry these joyous summer days will be things of the past. It will never be quite the same as it has been, Guy; we have been so untrammelled, and have had no one to please but ourselves. However well things may go with us, we must ever find my father difficult to satisfy; it is his nature."

"Coming home to-morrow night?" repeated Guy Forrester, sitting erect in his astonishment. "Why, Hawthorn, dear, you should have told me this earlier. We have not an hour to lose!" and he arose and began packing up his things with rapid fingers.

"You are not going, Guy?" she said, in a startled voice.

"Yes, sweetheart, I am!" he answered brightly. "I am going to London by the first train to obtain a special license by hook or by crook; for one thing is quite certain—we must be married to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XL.

"SURELY YOU CANNOT HESITATE? DO YOU NOT LOVE ME ENOUGH TO TRUST ME, HAWTHORN?"

MAY DALKEITH sat looking at her lover in speechless astonishment. She had given no decided answer herself—she was afraid to do so; and now he had taken the matter into his own hands, and had settled it all for her. It relieved her from responsibility, and on the whole she was not sorry.

There are some women who shrink from great decisions, and are glad to have them made for them; and at that moment of their life May was certainly one of them. She had lived so long alone that it was pleasant to be thus taken possession of and managed for, and she in no way contradicted Guy Forrester when he said boldly that they must be married on the morrow.

On the contrary, it was agreeable to her to feel that she would have some one to take care of her; some one upon whom she could lean, and whom she could trust with all the thoughts and feelings which had hitherto been hidden in her heart, or which she had ventured only to whisper to the birds and the flowers, to the summer sunshine and the passing clouds.

What joy it would be to her to share all the overflowings of her soul with the man she loved; and as she thought of it she sat as in a dream, then raised her eyes to watch his movements.

He stopped to look at her, for her face was lighted up by her inward thoughts to a more spiritual beauty than he had ever yet seen upon it, and the need for haste vanished from his mind.

"Don't move—don't speak!" he cried anxiously. "You are looking simply lovely! I must catch that expression!" and he eagerly seized up his paint-brush from one of his tin boxes, but he laid it down again with a sigh, for the expression was gone.

"Hawthorn, cannot you look like that again?" he asked, but the spiritual phase was not to be recalled.

"Well, never mind," he laughed; "perhaps it is but so, for time is precious and a painter is apt to forget the passing minutes. There,

I have put all my things together, love, and now for a final talk before we land. May, are you content to leave everything to me?" he inquired, his dark eyes fixed beseechingly on hers.

"Yes, I leave it all to you," she answered, smiling up at him. "I may as well begin to-day as to-morrow," she added, with a happy laugh; "only, Guy, I shall be so frightened when you tell papa."

"Will you, little love?" he replied, amusedly. "Well, I don't think I shall be. Sir Roger cannot be more than angry; he can't quite eat us, now can he?"

"No, not quite," she admitted; "and perhaps I shall not mind so much after all. Your love will make me brave, Guy."

He rewarded her for her words by a shower of kisses, and then asked her to give her attention to business.

"Now look here, little woman," he said. "I told you that I am off to London at once, and I will have the license before I sleep to-night—and as for that, my test will be taken on the cushions of a first-class smoking-carriage, for I shall return by the midnight train, but not to St. Ormo."

"My little girl must meet me where there is no chance of her being known, for if your face is unfamiliar in these parts, May, dear, your name is not, and we want to keep the matter as quiet as possible until your father has heard of it from our own lips. It will never do for it to go to him from others."

"So, sweetheart, suppose you come to meet me as far as Southmore. I have a friend there, a clergyman, who will make no difficulties about marrying us whatever, so that will be all right."

"No one could do that about a special license, could they, Guy?" she inquired, with so straightforward a look that he saw he must not tell her too much.

"Oh, no; of course not!" he answered, lightly. "A special license will meet all the exigencies of the case; but a friend will be better than a strange clergyman, and more pleasant for you."

"But how am I to get to Southmore?" asked May, helplessly. "You see, Guy, the world beyond St. Ormo is *terra incognita* to me, and I should be terribly nervous going anywhere alone!"

Guy Forrester was lost in thought for a time.

"That had not occurred to me," he acknowledged, slowly. "Girls of the present day are so independent, that it never struck me you would be unable to find your way. However," he added, brightening, "I know what can be done. My valet, factotum, or whatever you may be pleased to call him, the fellow who is my jackal, and looks after all my comforts, and is quite invaluable to me, is to be trusted. He shall bring a closed carriage to the road to St. Ormo, below the lake, at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, and he shall escort you to Southmore without any trouble whatever, and I will be at the station to meet you, dear. We will send the fellow back by the first train, as we don't want him to know more of our affairs than we can help; and I will take my wife safely home after the ceremony. Will that suit you, darling girl?"

May Dalkeith knew nothing whatever of the world, and the plan he proposed appeared to her a perfectly easy and straight-forward one.

Still, a fear lurked within her womanly young heart that there was something unpleasant in the scheme—something which other women might condemn, and which, in fact, she should herself condemn in another girl; but the artist's eyes were fixed upon hers, his arm was about her, her hand clasped in his, and these ideas were quickly swept from her mind.

"It is our only chance of happiness, my darling!" he urged, warmly, as he held her to his breast.

"Surely you cannot hesitate? Do you not love me enough to trust me, Hawthorn?"

She did love him well enough.

She nestled confidently in his arms in silence, while he bent over her, and smiled too; for he read her consent in the sweet, contented young face, so full of faith and affection; and, having struck the iron at the right moment to mould it to his will, he looked at his watch; and, declaring that he had not one moment to lose, he bestowed upon her an impassioned embrace, then took immediate possession of the pole, and propelled the punt to the landing-place.

"What shall I do with your mother's picture, May?" he asked, taking it carefully out of the boat. "It won't do to let Sir Roger see it at present."

"It will be quite safe in my room," returned the girl, with a half-sad smile. "My father has never been inside the door since I can remember. Oh! Guy, my life was such a lonely one until you came to brighten it! I cannot think how I existed so long without sympathy or love!"

"Poor little girl! Well, you will always have your old Guy to torment you after to-morrow! Hawthorn, I wonder if ever you will tire of my society? If ever you will wish that your sweet voice had never carried a message across the lake to the strange artist sketching in the punt upon its surface, drawing him to your side, as though you were some fair enchantress or water-nymph? I half expected to see the owner of that dulcet voice sitting upon the bank among the fern-leaves combing out her long hair, and gazing at her own pretty face in a hand-mirror!"

His light, nonsensical, complimentary words would have been recognised for the verbiage they were, by an older woman, but they sounded sweet enough to May Dalkeith, accustomed to live in the world her own romantic ideas had conjured up; and when all was said, May was still quite a child in years and in experience, even though she was tall and womanly in stature. So she smiled up at her handsome lover.

"And, instead of a mermaid, you found a poor, lonely little girl, and came to cheer her—eh, dear? I cannot help thinking how fortunate it was that papa was away, or we should never have been allowed to see anything of each other, Guy, and I should have been afraid to come out to talk to you. It was like the hand of fate, his going just then, when he had never left St. Ormo cottage for so many years. Was it not, Guy?" and the great blue eyes sought the dark ones of the artist.

"Most fortunate! quite like the hand of fate!" he replied, trying to keep back the curl of amusement from his lips, and the sparkle which flashed out of his eyes; knowing, deep down in his heart, as he did, that his own cunning plot had sent Sir Roger from St. Ormo at this critical juncture. His only surprise was to find that he was expected home so soon.

However, he did not greatly regret the fact, as it now obliged him to hasten May into an immediate marriage, and he felt that the very haste would be helpful to him in gaining her decision in his favour; and the less time she had for thinking over the step she was about to take, the more likelihood there would be of her carrying it to the end.

So, still smiling, he walked with her up the beautiful garden into the house, where he deposited her mother's picture; and the old man-servant, Thomas, who was at his work, rolling the already smooth green lawn, looked after them with a somewhat anxious expression upon his time-furrowed features.

"Poor lamb! poor lamb! I hope it is all right," he muttered, as they were lost to his view within the rustic porch. "She has had a sad life enough, and I'd be right glad she should have a sweetheart to amuse her; but one does hear such strange stories of those artists; and that one's handsome enough, to be sure, but I don't like the look of him, and that I don't. There's too much effect about him, and not enough reality." And he shook his

head slowly, and rubbed it with a reflective movement.

"If only Sir Roger was not so hard," he jerked out in discontented accents. "He ought to know; but I'll not be the one to tell him. I'll have a talk to Mrs. Wheeler about it; she's one of the good sort."

"If it's for the poor little lassie's happiness, it's not old Thomas who will tell tales on her, and get her into trouble. But I'd rather see a young fellow come after a girl when her father is upon the spot to take care of her. But there: like enough Sir Roger would let her have no sweetheart at all, and girls can no more be happy without them than children can be without toys," he added, laughing, as he put up the handle of his roller, and turned off by a back path to the kitchen door; and having carefully wiped his boots he passed in, making for the housekeeper's room, where he knocked gently at the door, and the kindly face of Mrs. Wheeler was soon before him.

"Are you disengaged, mum?" he asked. "I've a word to say to you in private, if you can attend to it."

"Of course, Thomas," she replied, with her usual good-humour. "We have lived too many years together in one situation for me to make objections. Come in and make yourself comfortable, and, if it's private, shut the door."

Thomas Mandrake looked at the buxom figure and smiling face a little wistfully, and at the comfortable room too, so very different to his bachelor quarters over the stable; and it struck him, as it always did strike him whenever he came into Mrs. Wheeler's presence, that a clubbing together of interests would be very beneficial to his own condition; but two things had kept him from speaking his thoughts.

He was essentially a silent man; and a shy and reserved one, and he had never been able to begin; and, moreover, Mrs. Wheeler was altogether something superior to himself, in conversation and manners; and even though he made up his mind many times to speak, when absent from her, her presence overawed him. She was always kind and good-natured, but he never felt upon terms of equality with her.

"Is there anything on your mind, Thomas?" she asked, a little anxiously. "You do look grave, to be sure!"

"That's it, Mrs. Wheeler; Miss May is on my mind. She's sweetheating! There's no doubt about it, and we don't know anything about the gentleman, and although I haven't had much experience in such matters myself, I've heard that artists is a bad lot, and we don't want our young lady to get into trouble for her own sake, nor for ours neither, for if Sir Roger comes back and finds we've winked at her going on, why—"

He left off suddenly and looked the housekeeper full in the face.

"Yes! we should lose our situations undoubtedly," she admitted.

"Lose our situations!" he repeated, warmly. "We should be turned out neck and crop; that's what it would be, mum. There's no use in mincing matters."

"Well! I only value mine for Miss May's sake," said Mrs. Wheeler, gravely. "She has quite grown into my heart. I never had a child of my own, but if I had been blessed with one, I couldn't have loved her much better than Miss May."

"I'm mortal partial to her, too," admitted Thomas; "but I'm getting an old man, and situations are scarce at my age. Masters wants young and active fellows about them in these days. Not that they gets through half the work as we steady and persevering ones; and I'd be uncommon sorry to have to turn out. The place suits me, and I flatter myself that I suits the place. And it has come over me that it's my duty to tell the master that that young artist chap has been hanging about here making love in his absence. But there! if I thought it would get the poor little lass into trouble I'd remain deaf and dumb."

and blind, too, all my days. She's like sunshine in the garden, with her pretty face and her sweet, winsome ways, playing with the birds and singing to the flowers. I shouldn't like harm to come to her, and that I shouldn't."

"Then you had better hold your tongue, Thomas, or you'll make trouble enough," retorted the housekeeper, sharply. "It is no business of yours what Miss May does, and she'll come to no harm, unless she's driven to it; so you just let her alone. Artists has hearts the same size under their ribs as other folks. A man's a man, whatever may be his profession; and if Miss May loves him and can be happy with him, I won't be the one to stop her marriage. You never can have loved anyone yourself, Thomas, or you'd not be so ready to 'spoil sport' as the saying is. So, if you've any mind to keep in with me, you'd better be silent, or you and I will quarrel."

"If I've a mind to keep in with you, Mrs. Wheeler!" he began, with a very meaning look, and proceeded to rub his head once more to try and furbish up a suitable speech now that he had the opportunity. "Why in course I've the mind, Mrs. Wheeler, if only so be you shared it," he blurted out, spasmodically.

"Shared what?" asked the widow, and at that moment May's fresh young voice came ringing through the house, calling for her. "Why, there's Miss May," she said, quickly. "What were you saying, Thomas? Now, mind, whatever you do, you must be, as you yourself said, deaf and dumb and blind as far as Miss May's young man is concerned, or you and I will quarrel, remember that."

And Mrs. Wheeler bustled away in reply to the summons of her young mistress.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESULT OF THE GOLDEN KEY.

"Mrs. Wheeler," said May, "will you carry this very carefully to my room for me? I am just going to walk a little way along the road with Mr. Forrester," and having placed the picture with tenderness in her hands, she passed out at the doorway with her lover.

He paused by the summer house.

"I had better take my sketches away, Hawthorn," he remarked lightly. "We must leave nothing about which might tell tales!" and as he spoke he began putting them together.

But the spirit of wilfulness took possession of May Dalkeith.

"No, Guy; you lent them to me to copy, and I mean to keep them," she said, with decision.

A swift flash of anger kindled in his powerful dark eyes, but he had no mind that she should read their expression just then, and he let down his long sable lashes to cover them; nor did he speak till he could command them; then he smiled once more.

"Very well, my wilful darling, as you will; but if you must retain them, kindly promise me to put them safely away, out of sight," for he felt that the time had not yet come for him to use his authority; that he could do hereafter, he told himself.

"Yes; I will promise to take them all to my room as soon as I return," she answered, and he had to be satisfied.

Then they went out of the grounds side by side, the artist carrying his easel, &c., packed up into a small compass, and they walked on for some time without a word.

"One would think we had both taken the vow of silence, Hawthorn," said he, abruptly, with a sudden laugh. "I wonder if we have anything particular to say to each other before we part, which must be soon now, my little one, for I can walk at double the pace alone, and time is very precious. The loss of the train up, might spoil all our plans, so let

us stop at the road beyond the lake, just where the carriage will be waiting for you to-morrow morning; then there can be no question as to where you will find it."

"Here we are at the spot, May! Now give me a real good kiss; there is no one within sight, and go home and finish your picture. That will keep you from thinking too much, as it will never do for you to be over excited for your journey to-morrow. Go to bed early, darling, and dream of your coming happiness, and by that time I shall be speeding back to you with the license in my pocket, and I shall be waiting for you at Southmore Station. Shall you be glad to see me, darling?"

"Very, very glad," she returned, with a bright upward glance. "I should have liked to have gone further with you, Guy, but I will go home now if you wish it?"

"Wish it!" he echoed, reproachfully. "No, darling; but 'needs must' when his Satanic majesty drives!"—I mean Sir Roger! As I have said before, there is no time to be lost, so, Hawthorn, good-bye until to-morrow." He took her hand in his, and looked deep down into her eyes. "After that," he whispered, "You will be my very own little love, my sweet little wife, and there will not be many more partings—in fact, none, I hope!"

He was satisfied by the look of earnest confidence with which she regarded him; and the bright tear drops which stood in her eyes, and rested heavily on her long lashes, were far from unbecoming, and he knew that they were born of joy rather than sorrow.

"Oh! I shall be so glad never to part with you again, Guy!" she whispered. "You are so very much to me; my life was indeed bare before, and now it is quite full. I always thought love must be a sweet and beautiful thing, and now I know it!"

He smiled at her with his very best smile, then clasped her fondly in his arms.

"Little one, I must tear myself away! Good-bye, until to-morrow; our next will be a right merry meeting. Every man and every woman should be gay on their wedding-day! Run home, dear girl. I will watch you out of sight."

May clung to her lover as a timid child might do to one who has promised to be her protector from some hidden danger, for there was an undefined dread of she knew not what in her heart; but after some urging she turned away, and struck off towards St. Ormo cottage, standing more than once in the distance to wave him her last adieu. Then those two, who were pledged so soon to become one, went their different ways. He with a smile of satisfaction upon his lips, and feeling of triumph in his mind, that he had so very nearly attained the object with which he had come into Farnshire.

"Rangor little thought what good use I should make of his introduction," he laughed, as he walked on with rapid strides; "and I believe he regretted his talkativeness when he found I really meant to come down here. I don't think he ever intended me to look up the beautiful young recluse, although he liked to boast of her existence upon his estate. Men are very fond of talking to you of their family ghosts, but when you want to see them trotted out, they immediately try to draw the line. You must take their word for all they have told you, and not ask for ocular demonstration. However, when I made him keep his promise regarding the introduction to Sir Roger, he thought he was quite safe, and assured me I should never see the young lady unless it were through a telescope."

And Guy Forrester laughed heartily.

"It is my belief that Lord Rangor was afflicted with cold love towards Lady Dalkeith, and that the remembrance of her rarely beautiful face has to answer for his being still a bachelor," and it was only by degrees that his mirth subsided.

When he reached St. Ormo he had a short but serious talk to his factotum. Guy For-

rester's factotum was a man of middle age, and of somewhat slouching appearance, and he had a very unpleasant way of not looking you in the face, and regarding you when he thought you were not aware of it, from beneath his shaggy penthouse brows.

Mark Ford was decidedly not an agreeable looking man, but he was a faithful watch-dog to the artist, and that, perhaps, for a very good reason. He was under deep obligations to him, and was, in fact, in his power.

Mr. Ford had once been in a very much better position in life, but he had betrayed a trust reposed in him in business, and had laid himself open to the law, and came to such a state of abject poverty that he saw but one road out of his difficulties—self-destruction—and tried to drown himself.

Guy Forrester, whatever his bad qualities were, was not wanting in pluck, and he rescued the man from a watery grave, and having heard his history, had taken him into his service, and had never had cause to regret his good nature.

No task was ever too difficult for the man to perform for him, no job too dirty; and he proved most useful to his rescuer. He listened to all Guy had to say to him, and nodded his shaggy head in token of comprehension and assent.

"All right," he said, "I will carry out your orders without fail," and the artist, knowing he would do so, having dressed himself fit to appear in London, started without the loss of a moment for the railway station, just in time for the express, and made his way at once to Lambeth Palace, where, using the golden key liberally, he actually gained audience of the Bishop himself, and having presented him with a cheque for a hundred pounds for a charity in which his lordship was at that time deeply interested, he asked if he would do him the great kindness of supplying him with the license he required; and having given the necessary details, regardless of truth, by which he stated that his future wife was of age, he left the Palace with the special license in his pocket, and the Bishop went in to dinner with the cheque in his, and a sense of decided satisfaction at the unexpected addition to the funds of his charity.

Then Guy Forrester drove to Lord Rangor's bijou house in Park lane, but found that he was out of town, which rather annoyed him, as he had set his heart upon giving him an account of his success with the fair recluse of St. Ormo. But since that was impossible, he kept his hansom and was whirled to the Arts' Club, where there were a number of men assembled, but very few of his personal friends, so that he was obliged after all to bottle the news of his achievements in Farnshire; but ordered a *recherche* little dinner, which he discussed with a good appetite, notwithstanding he was nearing such a very eventful epoch in his life's history.

He kept his word and travelled down to Southmore by the midnight express, and having gone to the Railway Hotel, he had a bath and breakfasted, and was coolly walking up and down the platform at the station, waiting for the train which was to bring May Dalkeith, under the escort of shaggy, shabby Mark Ford, with a choice Havannah between his lips, and a gleam of triumph in his splendid dark eyes. But he was not so absorbed in the thought of his coming bride but that they fell saucily upon every pretty girl who passed.

When May had returned home the night before, Thomas Mandrake was again at work in the garden, and she passed him with a nod and a smile, rivetting the fetters of silence laid upon him by Mrs. Wheeler.

Once more Thomas had been very near to revealing his views and ambitions to the housekeeper, who was thoroughly unconscious of either.

Old Thomas was simply old Thomas to her. She had never thought of him in any other light, and treated him much as she would do a great faithful old dog who was accustomed to come in and out of the house—a clean, well-

mannered old dog, who always wiped his feet before walking over the beautifully scrubbed boards of the kitchen, the tessellated tiles of the passages, or the Brussels carpet in her own room.

That the old dog coveted one of the cosy easy chairs before her warm fire Mrs. Wheeler had never dreamt; nor can we say what her opinion would have been upon such a subject had it been clearly brought before her mental vision.

There is undoubtedly much unselfishness in the female heart, which makes it ever ready and willing to share its good things with others; and it is quite possible that if Mrs. Wheeler had once begun to think of Thomas Mandrake's needs and the many discomforts which attended his life, she might have considered the subject seriously as to how she could ameliorate his comfortless existence, but she had not thought about it at all.

Thomas had rooms over the stable, and "did for himself," while she attended to her own work indoors.

He had never had any womenkind that Mrs. Wheeler was aware of. He was used to doing for himself; and Thomas being a silent man she heard little or nothing of his affairs, nor dreamed of his ever-growing desire, as his age increased, that his comforts might do the same.

May passed into the summer-house, and tried to continue her painting, but her hands shook with nervous excitement, and she found that it was absolutely impossible for her to continue her work.

She had already defaced what she had done so satisfactorily in the morning, and had well-nigh lost the expression which she had then so well succeeded in catching; and, with an exclamation of annoyance she laid her brush aside, and sat looking at the beautiful face which she had been copying; which had been transferred to paper with such masterly skill by her lover.

All sorts of strange and romantic fancies chased one another through her mind, concerning the owner of that beautiful dream-land face.

That she had never in life seen such an exquisite one before was not in the least to be wondered at, her experience being of so limited a nature; but the shelves in her father's library contained many books of noted beauties, upon which May had often gazed with friendly eyes, wishing that the sweet lips could talk to her, and break the monotony of her existence; but never before had she seen any face which held the same deep interest for her as that sketch made by her lover's hand, in the days which had passed by, before he and she had met.

There was something in those soft, gazelle-like eyes, which seemed to look straight into her own soul, and commune with her spirit—something in the ripe lips, so full of sweetness and sadness, which she felt actually spoke to her.

May felt as though the picture were a living and moving woman, asking for her sympathy and affection; the expression was so tender and pleading that she sat very still, as though, if she were quiet enough, those lips would open to tell her their story, which, surely, was not all happiness; for if the gipsy had been happy when her likeness was taken, there was a strange mysterious depth of sadness to be detected beneath the sparkle which at first sight met the vision.

And May Dalkeith wondered what the beautiful face was trying to say to her; for so much were her nerves at tension, that, for the time being, she regarded the portrait as a thing of life.

How long she sat there she never knew, but a gust of wind suddenly arose, and came rustling through the trees and bushes, and swept by with a cry like that of a human soul in pain, and blew the picture from the easel.

It fell fluttering to the ground, and the strange communion between the fanciful May

Dalkeith and the beautiful portrait was brought to an unromantic conclusion.

She hastily lifted it from the floor of the summer-house, and brushed away some particles of dust from the sweet face with her dainty cambric handkerchief.

"Gipsy," she whispered, very softly, "perhaps you and I may meet one day, and then you shall tell me all your trouble." And placing the sketch with the others in her portfolio, she walked, in a very reflective mood, into the house, carrying them straight up to her own room.

(To be continued.)

JUDITH.

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CHAPTER XXXV.—(continued.)

JUDITH sat herself down on the largest trunk and observed disconsolately that she would not go after all. Mrs. Trevor who was in front of the looking-glass diligently repairing the damage done to her complexion, turned round and asked rather sharply, what foolishness was in her head now.

"I ought to have thought of it before, but unhappiness makes one selfish I believe, or at least it has had that effect on me. You know how people have been talking about me lately—a great many of the people I knew before never even bow when we meet, and it is not fair to go to your house and perhaps throw some of the obloquy on you."

Mrs. Trevor relinquished her occupation, and coming over to her side, took her by the shoulders and shook her.

"You are not to talk such nonsense," she said severely, "I won't have it, won't listen for a moment! I have been as much discussed as most women in my day, and have done as much to deserve it; but now that I am getting old and ugly—*passée* in fact—people are beginning to admit there's no harm in me after all. So you see I can afford to risk a little more from people's tongues, and even if I could not I should enjoy setting them at defiance. I have done more from pure devilment over and over again than I am doing now from a better motive!"

"But, if you are reckless, it is all the more reason why I should think for you and refuse to let you do so much for me," urged Judith.

"You are talking like an old woman, and I am old enough to be your mother, though its not to everyone I would confess it. You have been independent too long, it's time you became obedient. Make haste and get ready. We might walk back and let the luggage follow."

So with a little more persuasion the thing was settled, and the two women set off on foot, Judith lighter-hearted and more hopeful than she had felt for weeks, her step more buoyant, her eyes brighter, in spite or perhaps because of, recent tears.

"We will go round by the post-office if you are not too tired," said Mrs. Trevor, as they went. "I like to put my letters in myself; and this one," touching lightly a very thick misaive that she held with her other hand, "may be overweight."

"Your husband is in Burmah still? You must have so much to say to him always," remarked Judith, jumping to a conclusion.

Mrs. Trevor stared a little, then realising the mistake, burst out laughing.

"Oh! that's not for Jack. This is his." Drawing out a stamped half-anna envelope from underneath, she doubled it gingerly between finger and thumb to demonstrate its flimsiness, and laughed again a little defiantly. "Rather thin, is it not?" she asked, half blushing, and yet with a twinkle in her eye that showed she appreciated the joke, even though it told against herself.

Judith laughed too. She would have laughed at anything just then, so great was

the reaction in her mind, the relief after her late anxiety—so intense. She had not grasped the point of the incident until the thicker letter fell to the ground face upwards, revealing the address.

She could not help seeing then it was for Captain Graeme, and Mrs. Trevor knew that she saw it, and the blush deepened on her face as she picked it up.

"Poor Captain Graeme has gone to Meerut for the races. He likes to hear all the station news, so I have written him quite a budget. I hope he'll have the patience to read it through."

Judith did not answer immediately; and to change the subject, Mrs. Trevor pointed in front of her with her parasol.

"Who is that?" she asked, indicating a young man who was walking on ahead.

Something in his manner, or perhaps the well-cut clothes betrayed him to be a stranger in Jaalpoore, where the golden youth generally disported themselves in riding kit or flannels at that time in the afternoon.

Moreover, Mrs. Trevor, who had rather a keen eye for masculine attractions, decided he had more style, a more distinguished air, than most of the men she had seen about, and her curiosity, stimulated at first, became real.

"Who is it?" she repeated, and touched her companion on the arm.

But Judith's eyes were fixed on the young man with a different expression. Something peculiar in his walk, a gesture with his hand as he stopped and accosted a passer-by, filled her with vague expectation that grew to certainty as she gazed.

Her lovely lips were parted, her whole face was bright with anticipated pleasure; and as the stranger turned and saw them, she sprang forward with a low cry.

The next moment he was holding both her hands tightly as though he could never let them go, looking down at her with such unmistakable love, such ardent admiration, that Mrs. Trevor instinctively stepped back, and pretended to look back another way.

"It's always good policy to do as one would be done by," she decided to herself, with a little air of worldly wisdom.

But Judith had already remembered her existence, and pulled her forward impulsively.

"This is Avon, my cousin. Lord Avon, Mrs. Trevor," she explained as introduction, and then turning to him again, "Oh! Dick, Dick, I am so glad to see you!" She was half smiling as she spoke, but the tears were very near as well, and a break in her voice showed him that she had some other cause for emotion; it was something more than mere delight at seeing him that moved her so deeply.

After an interchange of civilities with Mrs. Trevor, he stood looking a little awkward and put out, as men will when they see the woman they love in trouble, and cannot say what they would; they have less power of dissimulation than the other sex, or, perhaps, deeper feelings to conceal. Mrs. Trevor was, however, nothing if not discreet, and with kindly tact released him at once from an uncomfortable position.

"Judith, will you take your cousin straight to the house, and persuade him to stay to dinner if you can. I will follow, as I have some shopping to do, besides visiting the post-office on the way. I daresay I will not be much later than you."

With a nod and smile she went off, not waiting for the objections which the others were, in fact, little inclined to make; and at once, when they were alone, Avon caught his cousin's hand, and utterly careless of the people who passed and turned to stare, he kept it in his clasp.

"Now child, tell me all about it," he said tenderly, "you have been in trouble, I am sure, and it is something serious, I am afraid, for never in the old days have I seen you look so desperately unhappy."

Taking him by the most unfrequented route, and trying to speak calmly, so as not to arouse his wrath against those who had injured her,

Judith told him all; how, only an hour before, she had despaired, being without money and without friends, as she believed. And then she asked him how it could have been the last two mails had brought her no letters from her father, and that even her telegram had elicited no reply?

Lord Avon looked very grave as he replied.

"That is partly the reason I have come. The fact is, Judith, I have not properly carried out your last injunctions, though honestly I tried to do my best. When I saw your father (at his office) he would never let me go to his rooms, and it was not until nearly a month ago I discovered the reason. Ever since that crash came it appears that his one idea has been to save money to pay off the creditors, and out of his wretched salary he regularly laid by a certain sum, spending just enough to keep body and soul together, and slaving almost as hard by night at extra work he managed to get on in the day.

"Of course, he broke down at last, and it was then I discovered why. He was seriously ill at first—a sharp, short attack to which we feared he might succumb; but now he is quite out of danger, and only in need of careful nursing, which he gets. My mother has carried him off to the Riviera, as she herself has been unwell, and not equal to the fatigue of a season; and they sent me to fetch you, and say they do not know how they got on without you, and indeed I do not know either."

"It has been as hard for me. I never knew how dependent I was on you all until I left and had to stand alone," she admitted, tearfully.

He looked at her intently, and saw in her face more than she supposed. There was a soft light in her eyes, a tremulous quiver of her lips that he had never noticed before, more heart in her whole expression; and, vastly as he admired her in this new mood, Avon was sensible of a sharp pang, realising at once that it could not have been for him that the statue had turned to living, loving woman, not through him that his Undine had awakened at last from girlish dreams of independence, and found her soul.

His voice was harder, his manner more constrained, as he went on.

"Another reason for my coming, scarcely less urgent, was to catch that fellow Collett. Is he still here?"

"I saw him yesterday."

"Then he is as good as captured. I am armed with proofs, and, moreover, have a detective in plain clothes acting as my valet, who knows him well, and has something else against him. He's following us now."

"He will be sent to prison of course?" she hazarded.

"Not a doubt of it. Twenty years' penal at least!"

All Judith's late vindictiveness faded now her revenge was in her grasp. She only remembered that he had loved her—honestly loved her, whatever his other faults; and a feeling of pity conquered her resentment for ever.

She knew too, or guessed, that if he were found out he would involve the Commissioner in his ruin, and she could not forget that he was Winifred's father. Moreover, that he had sent a friend to her in her need.

"Dick, will you do something to please me?" she asked, softly, just touching his coat-sleeve with her gloved fingers, and looking pleadingly into his eyes.

"I would do a very great deal, Judith," he replied.

"Then let him go free. It is only right that he should restore to my father all of which he robbed him. Put as much pressure on him to do that as you please, but don't prosecute him; let him go. He will suffer sufficiently as it is."

Again he surveyed her critically, wondering if it could possibly be that she loved this man for whom she so sweetly pleaded.

It seemed strange if it were so, but that

women were strange he knew; they had always been beyond his comprehension.

Never dreaming what turn his thoughts had taken, his cousin continued.

"And, Dick, make him promise not to trouble Sir Julius Sheraton any more. Make him give up the hold he has upon him. Sir Julius was always good to me, and I loved Winifred very much!"

"It shall be as you wish, dear!" he answered, quietly.

The endearing epithet slipped out without his knowledge, but Judith started when she heard it; then took it as a sign that he cared for her no longer, since his tone had been matter-of-fact, and his manner after his first impulsive greeting colder than she ever known it to be, and more composed.

Stealing a shy glance into his face she decided he looked older, manlier, even better-looking than she had deemed him formerly; though he had always been considered handsome by others.

His eyes, which she had often remembered as the truest she had ever seen, were unchanged in their expression; steadfast as ever, and as kind.

She thought the sunburn became his vastly, too, but dropped her eyes incontinently as he caught her gaze and smiled.

At the same moment they reached Mrs. Trevor's door.

"You will come in?" she asked, timidly.

"Not to-night. It is absolutely necessary I should clinch the Collett affair at once, before he gets wind of my arrival. I will come to-morrow to tell you what I have done. Don't let me keep you standing; you look so white, Judith, and so tired. Good-bye!"

He took the hand she gave him, and held it longer than perhaps was absolutely necessary, yet there was no lover-like pressure, no fond lingering over the farewell, as there had been so many times before.

As he left her, and strode away in the direction of the Sheraton's house (not looking once behind him, though she stood there waiting for a backward glance), Judith sighed, for even in this first delight at the ending of all her troubles, she was conscious of a cold chill of disappointment.

In her heart she had counted upon his love as a thing she might fall back upon at any time; and now that it had failed, she knew how precious it might have been.

No better man had ever come within her ken; no one quite so reliable, so worthy of a woman's love; no one so handsome, so true, so dear!

And she had lost him!

Sighing, she turned, and went into the house; and, in spite of the promised happy change in the circumstances of her life, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ENDING OF HER STORY.

LORD AVON came early the next morning to report progress.

He had met Johnson the night before, and only left him in charge of the detective to decide whether he would agree to the terms that had been explained to him, as they were the only ones that would be accepted.

Avon was on his way now for his reply, but spared a few moments to see his cousin on the way; during which time she told him in a few words the story of Gerald Sheraton, and asked if anything could be done to help him.

Promising to do his best he hurried away.

Then the whole long day remained for Judith to wait and wonder how things would be in the end; and whether, even if she gained all that had been lost to her before—the wealth and comfort, the knowledge that her father was honoured and revered, she herself taking her old high place—whether all this would console and compensate her for that which, by her own folly, she had missed.

For a woman to love where her love can never be returned is surely a very cruelty of pain; but there is an added bitterness in the cup which she must drink to the dregs—when it has been once rejected, and only valued when too late for the error to be repaired.

It was clear enough to Judith now that Avon had always been first in her heart; only when he wooed her she had been inaccessible to such vows and words, believing herself to be above all need of love.

Very gradually her soul had awakened to the knowledge that she was as other women were, with a longing even greater than theirs, because so long repressed for sympathy and support; and while she was realising how she missed the constant devotion of her cousin, another stepped in, and turned all the yearning tenderness of thought towards himself.

Even when she fancied she cared for St. Quentin most, in the innermost recess of her mind there had been a reservation which might have told her she had possessed more experience, that her feelings were less deeply engaged than she supposed; since in real passion there is no reason, no reservation of any sort.

Afterwards, when she began to see the man as he was—weak, shallow, and inconstant—the pain she naturally felt was dulled by scorn, and comforted by the belief that one, at least, was steadfast, though all others failed her; and in the thought of his faithfulness, the sense of sorrow at this other lover's defection lessened, and altogether died away.

Always she had contrasted the two men—one so strong and reliable, the other fascinating, it is true, but false from the beginning in his relations with her; and even when most dazzled by the last, her judgment had always inclined to her first lover; and in the light of his perfections, the poor society graces and tricks to please, which, to the other, were a second nature, grew dim and paltry in seeming as they were in fact.

Slowly but surely her heart had followed the guidance of her head, until all memory that such prompting had been required faded away, and she was now as hopelessly in love as any woman could be; the very strength on which she had prided herself acting against her as she gave up her whole soul in utter abandonment to the new emotion that possessed it.

Trembling and passion-pale she waited Avon's coming in the evening all alone in the pretty sitting-room, with its rose-shaded lights and masses of scented flowers, where Mrs. Trevor had left her. But when at last he came—nearly an hour after the time he had himself appointed—she grew chilled at his grave demeanour, the air of cold politeness with which he took her hand and immediately dropped it.

Some hope there must have been in her heart, though to herself she had denied it, or she could not have felt such cruel disappointment.

Blind to the happiness that was just within his grasp, Lord Avon began to tell her of his success, which had been complete.

Arrangements had been made for her father's fortune to be refunded almost in its entirety, and a vindication of his honour dictated, written, and signed.

Sir Julius Sheraton might also rest in peace for the future, since a solemn promise had been extracted from his tormentor to trouble him no more.

Johnson, alias Collett, alias Stranghan, was left free, though comparatively poor, and with no chance of levying blackmail any more, as he had done ruthlessly in the past.

Yet that he would rise again seemed more than likely, as he had great buoyancy of nature and sufficient cleverness always to deceive the many who were less amply gifted than himself.

Another piece of news there was to tell that made his listener's eyes glisten gratefully, and a faint colour came into her cheeks.

A letter had been despatched to Gerald

Sherston, offering him the agency of Lord Avon's country estate, where his past history unknown and his native connections handsomely pensioned off, he could start a new career, and be honoured and liked as he was before in youth's madness he made such shipwreck of his prospects.

"How good you are!" cried Judith, enthusiastic in her thanks.

"The goodness was all yours. I only did what I thought would please you."

"And it has pleased me. It will please Mrs. Trevor, too, and she has been so kind."

"What had Mrs. Trevor to do with him?" in some surprise.

"He loved her and she jilted him, then he went all wrong. I never heard the whole story."

"Not a very uncommon one, I daresay. You women have much to answer for."

The unusual accent of bitterness in his tones startled her. She looked up and saw something in his face she had never seen there before—a hard expression, that had yet something of pain in it, pain so intense that missing the clue to it she grew awed, and was afraid to speak.

He, too, said no more, but returned her questioning gaze with mournful emphasis; and at last the silence between them became so pregnant with meaning that he put an end to it by asking, with a half laugh,—

"Whether her taste in dogs had not deteriorated since they parted?"

Turning, she saw Dandy lying at full length with his nose between his paws, surveying the stranger distrustfully with his pink-rimmed eyes, and certainly not looking either handsome or well.

"It was Winifred's; I shall keep it all my life!" she said, a little brokenly, perhaps glad of this vent to her emotion, for it was hard to show no feeling at all, with her heart so full of love and sorrow.

The tears gathered in her eyes as much with self-pity as regret for her friend, when Avon stopped and took the little dog on to his knee, caressing it by fits and starts as they talked.

"And the politics, Dick? Are they progressing?" she asked presently. Again he broke into a laugh, not a very merry one.

"Fairly well. My speeches were always reported at length, but they were criticised terribly by the opposition papers. Once or twice I was asked to give my authority for certain statements, but that I refused to do, of course."

"It would have been rather *infra dig.* to say 'Cousin Judith' helped me, would it not? And, after all, perhaps I gave you wrong impressions?"

"I hope not, for I always passed them on as they came to me, neither adding nor detracting from them one iota. I spoke up manfully for the oppressed and mild Anglo-Indian, and condemned numerously the overbearing Hindoo."

"Oh, the Mussulmans are far worse," she interrupted.

"I'll remember that next session. I assure you the whole House was moved when I drew a picture in most vivid colours of how an impudent wretch in the bazaar refused to mend a lovely lady's boot until he knew the exact sum she meant to give in remuneration."

"How stupid you are!" she laughed, and again the conversation languished.

There was a want of harmony between them, a jarring note, of which neither had ever been conscious before, though once the love had been all on one side, and now it was equally divided, while only a word, only a glance, was needed to ensure their happiness.

Still they stood apart, though in each heart was a yearning wish to come together; his arms hungry to enfold her, she only longing to lay her head upon his breast and sob out all the love and sorrow.

He had been seated opposite to her, with his stick tracing patterns on the carpet, his

head down bent. Now he jerked it back impatiently, and, with a half-strangled sigh, which, nevertheless, she heard and echoed, he rose and went over to the window.

She watched him wistfully, longing to say something, anything to release them both from a false position, yet afraid of saying too much.

It was dawning on her gradually that he loved her still, had never changed, as she feared at first, and that if he could only guess how it was with her, all might yet be well.

Yet how to let him know, how to betray a secret, which it is a woman's instinct to guard as jealously as her life?

Her sweet, blue eyes grew big with tears, her lip quivered piteously. There was nothing of the heroine about her then, no trace of her beautiful namesake in the Eastern story. It was a loving, timid girl who half stretched out her hands, and would have spoken, had he not turned and remarked hurriedly,—

"There is something else we must arrange, Judith. This going back—You must have a *chaperone* I suppose. Do you know anyone who is going to Brindisi?"

She shook her head; her hands had fallen meekly to her sides, the lids had drooped over her eyes, but still she was afraid to trust her voice.

"Would Mrs. Trevor come?" he asked again.

"I am afraid not. She is not very well off, you know."

"But, under the circumstances, do you not think we might arrange to defray her expenses?"

"It would be impossible, I am sure. She has taken a house in Simla, and her husband, she hopes, is coming back from Burmah this month or next. Besides, it would be difficult to make such a proposal to her."

"I suppose you are right," he admitted, dolefully, and then took to pacing the room to the imminent danger of sundry rather unsteady small tables on which were trustfully reposing vases of flowers and other breakable ornaments.

Suddenly a thought struck her, that made the blood fly to her face, and her fingers meet in a nervous grasp.

She looked so radiantly lovely, as she looked up and half whispered his name, that he came closer and sat down beside her.

"What is it, Judith? You understand that you and I cannot go together?" he asked, wondering why she trembled so, and would not meet his gaze.

"How did you and father propose I should go?" she counter-questioned, noddily, and her heart beat painfully in suspense, as she waited for the reply.

His sudden start showed her that the suspicion which had prompted the question was not unfounded.

"It was all a mistake," he answered, awkwardly, "we thought, or rather he thought—but it was a mistake, so what's the good of talking of it now!"

"I would like to know," she persisted, yet in tones so low that he had to stoop and lean towards her to hear them.

"We thought it was foolish, of course, and quite unwarrantable, that in your last letters we had noticed a change. You wrote as if you wanted us and were unhappy, and so much more kindly to me that I may be forgiven if I began to hope again, seeing that to win you was my one chance of happiness and hard to relinquish."

She made no comment; her head was turned away in displeasure, as he thought.

He had despaired too long to gather any hope from the crimson tip of one small ear, and the fluttering of the small white hands as they lay on her dark gown.

"It was a madness, of course, but your father encouraged me in it, and perhaps I needed no encouragement at all. He said, 'Go and marry her out of hand, and bring her here to get my blessing.' You may believe I required no second bidding. And all the

journey through I dreamed dreams until hope grew certainty, and I thought I had only to see you and all would come right. Then we met, and I knew at once it was a different Judith stood before me—a little older, a little sadder, but so infinitely more sweet that I longed to clasp you to my breast, to kiss your dear lips until at last they kissed me in return. Forgive me, I have no right to speak like this! I was not long in realising my mistake. I had not been ten minutes in your companionship before I saw that you had changed, but not for me. And yesterday I heard the confirmation of my fears. It is someone else you love!"

"Oh, Dick!" she cried, in passionate reproach.

It was only an ejaculation, but coming straight from her heart it carried conviction in its tone, and her sweet eyes, all suffused with feeling, told their own story.

He could doubt no longer, fear never again, though in very luxuriousness of delight he asked softly, while his arm stole round her waist, his very heart stopping for one long second to wait for her reply,—

"Judith, is it me?"

"It is you—all you!" she whispered back.

[THE END.]

NOVELETTE—concluded.]

UNCLE RICHARD'S MONEY.

—O—

CHAPTER VI.—(continued.)

CHARLEY was very proud of Gabriel, and told him so.

"You really do love that girl," he said. "I do not love her; but I would protect her honour with my life!"

You may be sure that Charley was not long in telling Edith of Gabriel's defence of her, and, of course, she was extremely grateful.

She had loved Gabriel before, but she fairly idolised him now, as well she might.

"Thank him for me," she said, simply, and Charley did what she asked.

Gabriel seemed annoyed that she had been told anything about the matter.

"I don't wish her to know that I take any interest in her," said Gabriel quickly; but he hardly knew whether to be angry or pleased. Gabriel had been afraid that Valentine would summon him for assault, but he made no attempt to do so.

Charley was never tired of warning Gabriel against Valentine North. He was certain that the man would do Gabriel some harm. His very silence made Charley all the more suspicious. He knew Valentine's character better than his friend did.

A new play came out, in which Edith had a prominent part. On the first night there was a most disgraceful scene. Men hissed and stamped, and two or three more unruly than the others had to be expelled from the theatre. All the papers praised the piece, and the critics spoke favourably of Edith, and consequently at a loss to account for the uproarious men that had filled the theatre. It was observed that the men only hissed when Edith was on the stage, so it was evident that their spite was directed against her.

In a few days the matter was quite cleared up, much to Gabriel's gratification. The mean and contemptible Valentine North had paid some twenty fellows to hiss Edith. Then all the story came out. How Valentine had made love to Edith, and had been scornfully rejected; how then he had resorted to slander; and, finally, how Gabriel had given him well-merited chastisement. He was held up to the derision of everyone, and was glad to leave London, for the time at least.

Of course all this talk about Edith was to the young actress's advantage, for thousands of people were anxious to see her, and crowds

were turned from the door. There was no standing room even, and the manager was delighted. Woe to the unlucky person who dared to hiss now! Her appearance on the stage was always accompanied by the clapping of hands.

Edith lived very modestly, although she had a fair income, but she was not a woman to care for display. Her behaviour was so very decorous that Gabriel respected her more and more.

Gabriel had left the army, and seeing that Edith was in a good position, began to spend his Uncle Richard's money. He gave his father enough money to retire from business, but the old lawyer would not think of such a thing. He accepted the money, and went on working very hard. He was engaged in a law case which he expected would make him fortune. A marriage certificate had just been found, and there no longer seemed the slightest doubt as to the ultimate result.

Charley invited Gabriel down to his place in Devonshire, and introduced him to his sister. Her name was Minnie, but in Gabriel's eyes she was a regular female Charley. She had the same laughing eyes, the same pleasing smile, and the same merry laugh. Charley had warned Minnie not to fall in love with Gabriel, and had declared him to be engaged.

Perhaps, if she had not been told this she might have fallen in love with Gabriel. As it was they were very good friends. Gabriel spent quite a delightful time down in Devonshire. Very often they would have a sail on the sea, and then it was that Minnie showed them that she understood a sailing boat better than the two men.

Gabriel Thorne had been staying two months with Charley, when he received a long letter from his sister May.

"I have been desperately ill, but I am better now," she wrote. "It has been such a long, weary illness, and I am still very feeble. You will be so surprised when I tell you who nursed me through; I am sure you will."

"The person who was by my side is the kindest, most self-sacrificing, delicious little angel I have ever met; and had it not been for her unceasing vigilance and care I should never have pulled round. That is what the doctor says, and he ought to know a little about the matter."

"My husband is very grateful to this little nurse—so grateful, that I tell him I shall grow jealous. She is as good as she is pretty, and I love her very much."

"The best of it all is, she does not think she has done anything wonderful in risking her life when I had that malignant fever. She was no hired nurse. Such love, such tenderness, such devotion, such supreme self-denial cannot be purchased with money any more than money can open the gates of Heaven. She is a relation of ours, Gabriel, a dark-faced girl, with the most magnificent eyes I have ever seen."

"She gave up a good engagement in order to render me assistance. I have only to tell you that she is an actress by profession for you to know her name."

"Edith!" cried Gabriel Thorne, before turning over the sheets. "On the other side the name was written."

"Who is Edith?" asked Minnie, laughingly; "a sweetheart of yours, I suppose? The young lady you are engaged to?"

"Edith is my cousin, and I am engaged to no one!" replied Gabriel. "What put such an idea in your little head, Minnie?"

Minnie glanced towards Charley, who gave her an imploring look in return, which plainly meant "do not betray me?"

"I thought that a handsome fellow like you would be sure to be engaged?" said Minnie, with one of her merriest laughs. "Girls always like great strong men over six feet high, with sinews that a prizefighter would envy."

"Thank you," said Gabriel, giving the girl a smile. Then he turned to Charley, and

asked him when the next train started to London.

"Going away?" cried Charley, in dismay. "Going away?" repeated Minnie. "Your determination is a very sudden one, since you arranged to go to the cricket match. I thought you took such a great interest in the noble English sport, and wished to see the gallant Australians!"

"Unfortunately I have received a letter acquainting me that my sister is very ill," said Gabriel.

"I am sorry to hear you have such bad news?" said Minnie.

"You'll have to hurry if you wish to catch the next train for London!" said Charley. "You had better start at once, and I can send your luggage after you."

Gabriel shook hands with the brother and sister, and hurried away.

They were sorry to lose Gabriel. Minnie liked him very much, and thought him the best friend Charley had.

She remembered, too, that he had saved her brother's life. Indeed, it was impossible for her to forget seeing how often Charley mentioned it.

On his arrival in London he went at once to his sister May's house. He was quite startled when he saw her, and could not conceal his sorrow.

Her beautiful hair had been cut off and her face was deathly white, and her hands so very, very thin.

"You are surprised to find me so changed?" said the invalid.

The young man's eyes were filled with tears, and he felt a lump rising in his throat. He really could not speak at that moment, and turned his face away from the light.

"If you had seen me a few weeks ago you would think nothing of my appearance now!" observed May.

He remained a long time with his sister, but saw nothing of Edith. Could it be that she was keeping out of the way?

May, looking at his handsome face, seemed to read his thoughts.

"You are wondering where Edith is?" said May.

"I had really no idea that you were a thought-reader!" observed Gabriel. "I was thinking of Edith, and had the idea that she was keeping out of the way because she had no desire to see me."

"It is nothing of the kind!" replied May, as she gave one of her bright smiles that lighted up her face.

She looked quite like her old self again, and Gabriel was glad to see this.

"Then why don't she show herself?" asked Gabriel, feeling that he would give anything to see Edith. He wished to express his gratitude for her great kindness to his sister.

"Because she is not here?"

"Not here?" said Gabriel.

"No. She went to Dick Denmead's yesterday. She has a new engagement, and could remain here no longer. She wished to do so, but there was a written agreement that she could not break."

Gabriel, it may readily be imagined, took the first opportunity of visiting Dick Denmead's house. To his amazement he only found an old care-taker there. The place was to let furnished for six months.

He was informed that Dick, his wife, and Edith were going round the provinces; but she could not mention any one town they were going to; so Gabriel went away rather disheartened.

Of course, it would not be very long before he could find Edith, but being of an impulsive nature, delay was torture to him.

CHAPTER VII.

EDITH'S health had suffered terribly through nursing her cousin May, and she often felt that the hard work was killing her. The

character she was now playing was one that taxed her strength to the utmost, and she was on the stage nearly all the time the performance lasted. She had been to a doctor, and he had advised rest and quiet. If she desired to live she must give up the stage. This she flatly refused to do, for it was the only way she had of obtaining her living.

"I suppose you must go on until you are compelled to give up," said the doctor pityingly. "A delicate girl like you ought never to have gone on the stage. It will ultimately end by killing you."

Perhaps it was all the better to die young, Edith thought, since there was no one to care for her. It was preferable to living a friendless old age.

She wrote to May, after she had been away a fortnight, a bright, cheerful, clever letter, in which she took care not to mention her ill-health. She did not wish to give her cousin any anxiety. The next place she was going to was E—

Of course, May showed the letter to Gabriel, and he naturally started for E—at once.

It was night time when he reached the town, and Gabriel noticed a peculiar lurid light hanging over it. A fire somewhere, observed some passenger in his carriage.

Once in the street, Gabriel inquired the way to the theatre of the first policeman he met.

"The theatre, sir; it's on fire!" said the policeman, and as he spoke an engine rattled by.

"Great heavens! Has the performance commenced?" asked Gabriel.

"They were right in the middle of it," responded the policeman, "when the building caught light. I need not tell you the way; you can follow the crowd."

Gabriel did as advised, and soon found himself opposite the burning building.

It was not only a curious crowd, but a desperate crowd, for amongst the lookers on were those who had relations and friends in the theatre. A line of sturdy policemen were drawn across the street.

"Are they all out of the theatre?" asked Gabriel of one of the policemen.

"They are doing their best to rescue them," answered the policeman.

"How about the actors?"

"They are in a dangerous position."

"You don't think they have a chance?"

"I would not give a farthing for their lives," said Policeman X. "You are looking bad, sir. Have you any friend inside?" and the policeman looked at him pityingly.

Many in the crowd asked to be allowed to pass, but the policemen kept in a line, and sturdily commanded the people to keep back.

"I must save my cousin Edith!" said Gabriel, who towered over everyone else.

"But you can't pass, sir!" replied the policeman, speaking very politely, for he knew instinctively that Gabriel was a gentleman.

"I must, man!" said Gabriel, determinedly.

The policeman shrugged his shoulders like a man who thought Gabriel was not worth answering; but he little knew his strength and courage, and his awful despair.

Without a moment's hesitation he hurled the policeman aside with a strength that astonished him, even in his wild excitement. He passed through the opening he had made, pushed on by the excited crowd behind him, who widen at the breach like a fierce rush of water through some weak embankment.

Gabriel stood where the noisy fire-engines were at work. The liquid that poured upon the doomed building looked like glistening running gold as it played upon the windows, through which the flames quivered and writhed like spiteful serpents' tongues, and through the heavy columns of lurid smoke could be seen the faces of those who had reached the roof of the piazza.

People were dropping down from the stone projection, and were quickly taken to the hospital by willing hands.

Without a thought of his own danger Gabriel climbed up one of the ladders, going, as people told him, to certain death. From a window through which the smoke rushed Gabriel saw a face—the face of Edith, the woman he loved. The ladder was too short, he could not reach her, and then came a cry of horror from the crowd. Edith disappeared from the window, and our hero looked upward in despair. Then a man appeared holding the girl in his arms. Even at that supreme moment, Gabriel felt jealous to see her in another man's arms—brave and true as his face was.

"Take her, mate!" said the man, and he handed her down to Gabriel.

"How about yourself?" said Gabriel. The only answer was a confident laugh, and then Gabriel descended.

No sooner did Gabriel reach the ground than he looked up to see what had become of Edith's brave rescuer. Already the flames had appeared at the window where Edith had stood only a moment ago. But the man had escaped.

He was a sailor in the Royal Navy, and managed to reach the ladder in some extraordinary way. The crowd closed in upon the sailor, and Gabriel never saw him again, for after doing all the good he could the man slunk away, as if ashamed of his own brave deeds.

Edith was more frightened than hurt, and it was with a cheerful heart that Gabriel took her to her lodgings. Dick Denmead and his wife were safe, having left the theatre for refreshment; and their joy in seeing Edith was indescribable, for they had quite given her up for lost.

The next morning's papers, of course, had a long account of the fire, and there were many articles about the insecurity of theatres, and many people wrote up after this to suggest plans which they believed would prevent a repetition of such a sad event. People read these letters, but the excitement soon died away, but, of course, Gabriel and Edith never forgot that moment of supreme peril.

It was not such a long time before Edith and Gabriel became man and wife; and her sister-in-law, May, would tell you, if you asked her, that Edith is the best of wives, the dearest of mothers, and the truest of friends.

[THE END.]

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—O—

CHAPTER XII.

MISS MORTON carried back her nephew and Miss March in triumph to Ivy Lodge, and for a week gloried in the belief that Blanche's baby-wiles would detach her father from his sorrow. But she was mistaken. Harry had one of those tenacious, persevering dispositions which never drop an aim they have once embraced.

Hal's aim was to find Rosamond Lestrangle, and hear from her an account of his wife's last hours.

So, when he had been a few days at Ivy Lodge, he calmly told his aunt he was going abroad, and had not the least idea when he should return.

"Hal!" cried the spinster, fairly in dismay. "I thought, for the child's sake, you would give up this idea?"

Hal took his aunt's hand, and laid it on his own brow. She started, her hand seemed almost burnt by the contact.

"There is but one thing will cool that fever, aunt!" said the young man, positively. "When I know all, when I have heard the very utmost of my darling's fate, there may be peace for me. I shall never rest until I have stood beside her grave, and kissed the stone that covers her!"

"I think it is madness!" said poor Miss

Morton. "Harry, you know absolutely nothing about this girl, except her name, and that she was beautiful. If you wander over every country in Europe, you may spend your life without ever finding her!"

"At least, I shall have done my best! You must not stop me, aunt!"

"And Miss March?"

"I am sure you will be kind to her, and try to make her happy. There is some secret in her life, I feel sure. Perhaps some day you may get her to confide in you."

Miss Morton looked strangely into his face, and he blushed almost like a boy.

"I know what you are thinking," he said, quickly, in answer to her look; "but, indeed, you wrong both her and me! Mary March is fair and true; but, even if my heart were not buried in Katy's grave, I should never have thought of wooing her. She reminds me of a cloistered nun. Her face has just that sweet, serene sadness! I tell you, Aunt Constance, I should deem it almost sacrilege to think of offering that pure child a heart whose has been consumed in a passion like mine! I look on May March as something as innocent and defenceless as my own Blanche!"

"I love her dearly!" said Miss Morton, with a tremendous "hem" she always said "hem" when she was angry. "I think her the sweetest, truest girl I have ever seen! I can't imagine how you can have saved her life, had you not loved her!"

Hal smiled.

"You forget my heart is filled with another image. Aunt Constance, you will take care of her, I know!"

But, before he left, he sought an opportunity of speaking alone to Mary.

"My dear," he said, in the fatherly way he often used to her, "I am going away. I may be absent for years. I shall travel from place to place, so that letters may not reach me. I look on you as my charge; so, before I go, tell me if I can do anything for you?"

"Nothing."

"You have no friends you would like told you are well and safe? I have thought a great deal about you lately. I believe I can remember every word you have told me about yourself, and I can't help thinking that somewhere in this great world there must be hearts aching for your loss."

"No one ever loved me but my father and mother," she said simply, "and they are dead."

"And you have no other relations?"

"No near relations."

"Have you any kinstolk? Did their harshness drive you to seek your fortune in London?"

She hesitated, but the kind glance of his spurred her on.

"I had one relation, and he—well, he thought me a burden. He was newly-married to a beautiful young wife, and I think he looked on all that was done for me as injury to her."

Hal took her hand.

"I understand. Miss March, it may be years before we meet again, and if ever you want to return to your family you will need money; or it may be that you will get tired of living here. My aunt is a peculiar woman to get on with, and I want you to feel quite free. Nothing has ever been said between us about salary, so perhaps I had better tell you I have instructed my lawyers to pay you a hundred a-year."

"It is too much—far too much!"

"It is not at all too much. I have told them wherever you are living this sum is to be sent you. If you leave Keston it will still be yours. I want to feel that, as far as possible, I have guarded against you ever being placed again in such a cruel plight as last December's. Nay, you must not thank me. Heaven knows the fortune I toiled so hard to gain has brought me little happiness! I believe the making your future safe is the only pleasure my wealth has ever given me."

Mary was sobbing quietly.

"What is it; have I hurt you?"

"No! oh, no! but, Mr. Bradley, it does seem so hard you should have come home too late."

The next day he was gone, and a great stillness fell on the little household at Ivy Lodge.

He went abroad; he was consumed by one feverish desire. It seemed to him, that Paris must be the place most likely to be chosen by an actress to spend her holiday in. He frequented every theatrical place of meeting, he went to all the haunts he thought likely to attract Miss Lestrangle, but he never saw a face deserving the manager's description—"beautiful as a dream." He did meet many pretty women, and one or two brides, who seemed to him to correspond with the description he had received in a faint degree. Poor Hal! How amiable and attentive he made himself to these ladies' husbands! How patiently he waited until he felt himself intimate enough to ask the question, "Was your maiden name Lestrangle?"

He never met an unkind look; he never suffered a rebuff all through that search.

Brides wept bitterly when they heard his story; happy husbands pitied him. There seemed to the honeymoon couples who heard his tale something tragically pathetic in this tall, handsome man wandering through the world in search of the woman in whose arms his wife had died. They respected his sorrow, and treated him with a rare delicacy, almost as though his grief set him apart from ordinary mortals, and shadowed him with a sacred cloud.

At last there came a ray of hope. It was the latter end of February, and he was rambling in grounds of Père la Chaise when he encountered a young girl leaning on a man's arm. She was simply dressed in dark blue, and although she did not look quite a lady, there was something attractive in her face.

Hal was aimlessly wandering up and down when he caught this remark,—

"Look at that gentleman, Polly! He must have lost his way; he's been pacing up and down this half-hour."

So had they, but then, as lovers, they considered themselves privileged to perform extraordinary feats. The girl answered, quickly,—

"I have been looking at him, Fred. I couldn't make out, for a bit, where I had seen him before."

"Did you know him?" and the voice had a certain suspicion of jealousy.

"I knew his face quite well; his picture used to stand on Miss Lestrangle's dressing-table. Many's the time I've dusted it."

Hal crossed over. The two looked as startled as if one of the tombstones had suddenly approached them.

"I beg your pardon," he said, raising his hat, "but you mentioned the name of Lestrangle. Could you tell me if it is the lady I am seeking—Miss Lestrangle, of the New Theatre?"

The girl glanced at her lover, and he took the answer on himself.

"I don't approve of talking to strangers," he said, civilly, "and my Polly is young, and a stranger to France."

"I will not offend her, I assure you. I will be as respectful as though she were the Queen. But for nearly three months my one object has been to find Miss Lestrangle, and I could not let the chance slip of hearing of her."

"Well, you speak fair enough," said Fred. We are just going to have a snack. If so be as you'd sit down with us Polly shall tell you all she can, but I don't approve of talking to strangers in the street."

It transpired, on the way to the nearest restaurant, that Polly was a lady's-maid whose mistress was spending a month in Paris. Fred was groom in the same family, and as soon as they went home to England he was to be converted into Polly's husband.

"You were saying," began Hal, when the tempting little repast he had ordered was

served, "that you knew my face from having seen my picture?"

"Well, sir, if it wasn't yours it was your twin brother's. You looked younger in the likeness, and brighter. I remember you had a little girl sitting on your knee."

No more room for doubt. He well remembered, just before he left England, sitting with Blanche in his arms while a second-rate photographer conveyed their image to cardboard. One copy of that likeness he had given to Katy, the other he always carried about with him. He took it out of his pocket and placed it in Fred's hand.

"I think this will show you my motive is not idle curiosity."

"Yes, sir," sheepishly.

"Well," went on Polly, "the picture was always in its place, and I often used to wonder who it could be. There were a great many people came to see Miss Lestrangle, but never the gentleman or the little child. I was with her nearly a year altogether, and then, one day, she accused me of listening at the door—a thing I wouldn't demean myself by doing," concluded Polly, virtuously.

"And my girl told me, and as I knew my lady wanted a maid I up and asked her if she wouldn't try Polly, which she did, and we snapped our fingers at Miss Lestrangle."

"Wait a minute, Fred," broke in the girl, pleasantly. "I told Miss Lestrangle I'd rather leave, and she was much put out; said she was going to be married soon, and wouldn't I stay till then; but in the end I went when my month was up."

"And where is Miss Lestrangle, now?"

"Why do you want to know, sir?"

Hal told her the story he had repeated so often; a tear glimmered in the girl's eye.

"I'm glad you've told me, sir. It's the first kind thing I ever heard of Miss Lestrangle!"

"Was she unkind to you?"

"She treated me just like dirt, sir; it was her way! She had no thought but for her own beauty! There was one gentleman just worshipped the ground she trod on; but she had no more feeling for him than a stick or a stone. But you'll see her for yourself, sir, for she's in Paris now!"

"In Paris!"

How his heart beat.

"Yes, sir; I saw her driving the other day, and for all she was so grandly dressed I knew her at once. The gentleman I told you of was with her, so I expect she married him."

Harry's heart beat wildly now.

"And where are they living?"

Polly was equal to the occasion. In an hotel near the Champs Elysees, she told him; she didn't know the name. Mr. Bradley thanked her from the bottom of his heart.

"We may never meet again; but I shall always recollect the service you have done me. I wish you all possible happiness in your married life. Perhaps, as I shall be away from England then, you will let me give you a wedding present now; you must choose it together!"

He was gone. Fred glanced at the crisp bank-note lying on the table.

"My stars, Polly, he's a tip-topper!"

"Is it five pounds?"

"It's fifty!"

"I hope she'll be good to him," murmured the girl, pitifully, "and tell him all he wants to know."

To anyone with Hal's well-filled purse it was not difficult to obtain a list and description of the visitors at any particular hotel. That very Sunday afternoon he was positive which was the hotel Polly had indicated; by the following day he knew the only bride staying there was Lady Castleton, a beautiful blonde whom report said, had been on the stage before her wedding.

He waited patiently until he saw Lord Castleton go out alone. Hal yearned for a *côte-à-côte* with the woman who had nursed his Kathleen, and he felt it would be better if he waited until he knew the husband was

away. A strikingly handsome man, despite the haggard feverishness of his expression, dressed and speaking as a gentleman, no one made the least demur to his seeing Lady Castleton, and he was ushered into an ante-room to await her ladyship's coming.

The hotel servant took his card to Pauline, who in her turn carried it to the Countess. It was the very day on which the Castletons were to dine at Mrs. Marshall's, and were prevented, as has been already related.

"A gentleman, my lady," said Pauline, brightly, well knowing her mistress greatly preferred visitors of the sterner sex.

"Who is it?" asked Rosamond, languidly. "No, don't bring me the card, I couldn't see it by this light; take it to the window and read it."

"Mr. H. Bradley."

It was in the gloaming. The fire by chance burnt dull. The maid saw no change in her lady's face, but thought her strangely long in speaking.

"I am not well enough to see anyone," Lady Castleton said at last, in cold, measured tones. "Pauline, do not take the message yourself; ring for James."

She was lying on the sofa as though trying to sleep, so it was natural that when Pauline returned she should find her mistress had flung a cambric handkerchief over her eyes, as though to keep out the light.

"I beg your pardon, my lady, but the gentleman wishes to know when he can wait upon you? He has come to Paris on purpose to see you, and thank you for your kindness to his wife."

Lady Castleton seemed to reflect.

"To-morrow morning at nine," she said, coldly. "What a nuisance it will be! I hate scenes, and this man is sure to make one!"

Pauline sent the message, and returned to find her mistress wide awake now; but she complained of her head, and declared it would be impossible for her to go to the Marshalls, as arranged.

Pauline made no observation. Honestly she thought she had never seen anyone look so ill as the beautiful and *feted* Countess.

"What sort of man is Mr. Bradley?" This was when the Earl and his lawyer were at dinner, and Pauline was sitting with her mistress.

"He's a handsome man, my lady, James says; and he seemed quite upset that you would not come to him."

"Could not," quietly corrected the Countess.

"Could not, I meant to say, my lady. I heard his voice, and it seemed almost hoarse it was so eager."

"Ah!"

"You look so tired, my lady!" said Pauline, persuasively. "Won't you try to rest?"

"Presently. I have several things to say to you. I think you like me, Pauline?"

The damsel had only been engaged since Lady Castleton's marriage. She probably found the Countess a far pleasanter mistress than Polly had found Miss Rosamond Lestrangle.

"I like you rarely, my lady!" said the girl, simply. "And I'm hoping to please you, and stay with you till I get married."

Usually the Countess took not the slightest interest in the concerns of those beneath her; but to-day she asked a great many questions, and listened to the story of Pauline's engagement, and how her love had gone to America to make a home for her in the Far West as eagerly as though the conversation had been about a member of the aristocracy.

"You'll find it very wild out there?"

"I don't mind that, my lady, so that I'm with Joe, and we have a little home of our own."

The tears welled up into Rosamond's eyes. Time was when her idea of this had been as simple as her handmaiden's—to be with her lover, to have a little home which should be only his and hers. Such had once been the Countess's own desire. Alas! alas! what fair

picture had been over years ago, and the lover who had taken part in it was not the Earl!

"Before I married," said Lady Castleton, slowly, "I saw a good deal of Mrs. Bradley."

"This gentleman's wife?"

"Yes. She was a lady, but very, very poor. She believed herself a widow. She was dying of an incurable complaint; had no friends, and seemed quite deserted, so I nursed her through her illness, and as there was no one to see to it I paid for a simple funeral in Brompton Cemetery."

"How good of you, my lady!"

Rosamond did not disclaim the praise.

"There was no one else, you see."

"And this gentleman?"

"I do not know, Mrs. Bradley believed herself a widow. I am quite sure of that."

"It is a sad story, my lady."

"I have told it you, Pauline, because I want you to do something for me."

"I'm sure, my lady, I'd do anything in the world."

The Countess smiled.

"I am not very strong, and my physician has told me any agitation must be dangerous to me. I could not see Mr. Bradley without a great deal of painful excitement, so I want you to see him for me."

"I, my lady!"

"Why not?"

"I could never behave right."

"He has never seen me. All he knows of me is, that when I was an actress I nursed his wife in her last illness. I will give you some memorial of Mrs. Bradley, and you must tell him she died of consumption; that she blessed him and her child with her last breath, and that she lies buried in Brompton Cemetery. He can see the stone for himself any day; it is just beyond the lime avenue."

"But my lady, the gentleman will see I am not a lady!"

"I think not. You are very pretty, Pauline!" The girl blushed. "You can put on my blue velvet gown, and some of my rings. You'll manage easily enough. If I saw Mr. Bradley, it would throw me on a sick bed for months."

"I'll do my best, my lady."

"And I'll do my best too," said the Countess, smiling; "so that when you leave me for that far-off western home, you do not go to your lover quite empty-handed. Now, take my keys and undo that trunk. You will find a red velvet casket in it."

Pauline handed the casket to her mistress, who looked whiter than ever now, and whose hand shook so much she could hardly turn the key.

She did turn it, however, and took out a likeness, evidently the one spoken of by Polly Groves. A tress of soft, fair hair (not so very unlike her own, only that it was dull and lustreless, whereas Rosamond's shone like bright pale gold), a baby's shoe, and a packet of papers—none of them very old, and some few bearing date of the preceding year. Last of all, she drew out a wedding-ring and keeper.

The Countess wrapped these relics hurriedly in paper.

"Now direct them."

The maid, though pretty and genteel-looking, had had a very inferior education, and it was a work of time to inscribe "H. Bradley, Esq." on the parcel in a very laborious text hand.

"Now you quite understand, Pauline. You will tell Mr. Bradley you believed him dead, and that these papers were given you to deliver to Mrs. Johnson; but as she never appeared to claim them, you took them abroad rather than chance them by the post."

"Yes, my lady."

"He will overwhelm you with gratitude, but you must not be led into much conversation with him; he is a most undesirable person."

"Yes, my lady."

"Get rid of him as soon as possible, and then come and tell me how you have managed."

"Yes, my lady."

"You can go now, Pauline."

Only just in time. Already her husband was coming in to tell her the dread calamity that had befallen them, and how he meant his love to brighten even their poverty.

Poor beautiful sinner!

Did a thrill of remorse come to her as he took her in his arms and told his story? Did she think of other lips that had bidden her be brave, for poverty was no misery where love lived? Did she think of all that she had done to become a Countess, and confess that the prize was hardly worth the price she had paid for it?

Not so. Rosamond, Countess of Castleton, was one of those women who never confess their mistake, who pursue their own way blindly, obstinately, as though they could direct the finger of fate itself according to their wishes.

She had wished to become Reginald's wife because he was rich, and could give her a place among the great ones of the earth. She had aimed, and suffered, too, to marry him. Now he was her husband, and his wealth had fled. No repentance troubled my lady; her one thought, her one aim, was to devise a plan by which he might keep the position he now held as one of earth's magnates.

She scorned the modest competence that might have been earned by his honorable exertions; she scoffed at the idea of being beholden to the Tracys. Rex was not naturally a covetous man, and he was the soul of honour, but he loved Rosamond dearly. She decided he must go to the Jews; and, in spite of his own scruples, of his better judgment, he consented.

"Can't you find," said Rosamond, when this point was settled, and her fair head rested on his shoulder. "I want you to promise not to wake me too early to-morrow, or rather to-day, for it is past three now."

"You shall sleep till dinner-time if you like, my darling!"

She laughed.

"That would be too much slumber even for me. No, I have told Pauline to come at half-past nine. Do not disturb me till then. Rex, I think all this has upset me. I feel so frightened. I cannot bear to be alone. Let me put my head on your shoulder, dear, and promise you will not leave me until Pauline comes."

"I never want to leave you, Rose."

Pauline had a great responsibility, and though flattered by her lady's confidence, she did not like the idea of what lay before her.

She was a pretty, graceful-looking girl; but no one knows better than servants the difference between a real lady and a young person who is ladylike, even arrayed in a blue velvet gown and a thick gold chain round her neck. Pauline felt very unlike the Countess.

The waiter was instructed to show Mr. Bradley to the private sitting-room, not the salon where meals were served, but a smaller apartment sacred to the Countess. Here she wrote her letters, promenade her pretty fingers on the piano, or, in fact, did whatever she fancied; and here Pauline and her package took up their station a little before nine. Promptly as the clock chimed the hour Mr. Bradley appeared.

Pauline rose.

"Will you take a seat, sir. I am sorry I was too ill to see you yesterday."

Harry glanced at her, and instantly decided two things; firstly, that the Earl of Castleton had married beneath him; secondly, that his wife's beauty had been very much overpraised.

"I have been seeking you far and wide since I returned to England in December," he said, gravely. "I was ignorant that Miss Lestrangle had become Lady Castleton."

Pauline dexterously hid her left hand in the folds of her dress. She was a shrewd girl, and it had just occurred to her that her mistress had forgotten to provide her with one of the indispensable "properties" of a bride—a wit, a wedding ring.

The interview progressed fairly. Pauline had a strong imagination; she coloured up and enlarged upon the few facts which had been told her, until they presented quite an eloquent narrative.

The tears stood in her eyes when Hal spoke of his home-coming, and the shock the news had been to him; in fact, the false Miss Lestrangle showed considerably more feeling than the real one would have done.

"Shall you be returning to England soon, Lady Castleton?" he asked, presently.

"I have no idea; my lord settles all those things."

"When you are in London I should like to show you my little girl, if you would not deem it an intrusion. It would be a pleasure to me to think my little Blanche had seen her mother's friend."

"I don't see children, sir!" said Pauline, forgetting her role; "but perhaps it would be better not to bring the darling. It's not as if I were my own mistress, you see."

Could Lord Castleton be an austere husband? It certainly looked like it.

Harry noted down the particulars of the grave in his pocket-book, took up the parcel, wrung Pauline's hand till it ached again, and then departed, leaving the damsel in a state of unmitigated relief. Then she retired to her own room, changed her dress, and stepping lightly into the passage crossed to her lady's room and knocked.

"Come in."

It was Lord Castleton, who gave the order. He was sitting ready dressed by his wife's bed, watching her as she slept.

"I do not think your mistress is at all well," he said, anxiously. "She has had a very restless night."

"I expect she's over-tired, my lord; my lady complained of fatigue all day yesterday."

He went out, and Pauline, believing her mistress to be asleep, quietly busied herself with the preparations for her toilette till an anxious voice called,—

"Pauline."

"Yes, my lady."

"Has Mr. Bradley been?"

"Been and gone, my lady. He seems quite satisfied, but very sad and out of spirits, poor gentleman; he returns to England to-morrow by the morning train."

My lady had intended to return to England by that identical train herself, but she decided her plans must be changed.

"Where is he staying?"

Pauline repeated the name of the hotel, and my lady's toilette progressed; she looked a perfect vision of beauty when she took her place at the breakfast-table.

"Rosamond," he said, fondly, "you were rightly named 'Rose of the World.' One might travel the wide world through and not find a face like yours!"

She smiled and kissed him.

"I think I am glad, Rex. Perhaps if I were old and ugly, you would leave off loving me."

"What are you going to do to-day, darling?"

She looked steadily at him.

"What are you?"

He heaved a sigh.

"You are quite resolved against the Grün-ingen plan, Rosamond? I think, dear, it is far better than your wild scheme."

"Then follow it."

"You consent?"

"I consent."

"Darling, I thought you would think better of it in the morning! Never fear, Rosamond, I will make you happy even in Grün-ingen."

"You mistake, dear," said his wife, gently.

"There is no question of making me happy there; I shall not go."

"Rosamond, you said you consented!"

"I will be no burden on your career. Why, Rex, it would blight your prospects to take me there; can't you see Lady Tracy hates me,

No, you shall go and carve out a diplomatic future for yourself, and I—"

"And you?"

"I will go back to the stage."

"Never, while I live!"

She looked at him wistfully.

"Wouldn't it be better, Rex? You seem so set against the simple, easy way of mending your fortunes. Wouldn't you rather be rid of your wife and free to follow the prudent schemes of your wise adviser?"

"Rosamond! what are you thinking of? Don't you know the very sound of your voice is dearer to me than all the world? Never speak of leaving me again!"

"Then you won't talk of going to Grün-ingen?"

"No, I will adopt your plan!"

Rose clasped her hands.

"Only, child," and his voice grew graver, "if Lady Gerda is found, and we are proved to be beggars, there will be no alternative of going to the Jews then. We should have to accept Grün-ingen, or even a worse position."

"Don't look on the black side, dear!"

He stooped and kissed her.

"Heaven knows, my darling, I do not wish to do so. It is for your sake, Rose, I am anxious."

"Then put away all thoughts of care and let us be happy. Why shouldn't we? We are young and rich—at least, we shall be someday. Meantime—"

"Meantime?"

"Meantime, I think you had better seek out the people who are to have the pleasure of providing for our necessities for the next three years."

He did not laugh now; it was with an air of intense reluctance that he rose.

"Good-bye, sweetheart. Kiss me and say 'Heaven bless you' before I go."

She murmured the words he asked for, and pressed her lips to his. It was on her tongue to tell him a benediction from her mouth could profit him nothing; for at moments of rare emotion such as this, Rosamond could not deceive herself, but was obliged to acknowledge in her heart of hearts that she was a sinner. She went into her own room now and rang for her maid.

"Pauline, it is very likely we shall leave Paris to-morrow, so I dare say you will like to have the day to yourself to make little purchases. I shall not want you until it is time to dress for dinner. See," and she took three gold pieces from her purse, "buy yourself some little trifle as a remembrance of Paris."

The delighted damsel needed no second bidding. She was off at once, the Countess casually remarking she should probably lunch with friends.

Left alone, Rosamond threw herself into a low rocking-chair and sobbed as though her heart would break. We have seen her sob so once before—the night when she accepted Reginald Travers as her future husband. But that was a crisis in her life, and this was none, unless, indeed, she wept for having seduced her husband into a dangerous and difficult path.

The storm was over at last, Rosamond dried her eyes, and dragged a large box from the closet where her trunks were stored.

This box had never been opened since her marriage. Had she possessed any friends in England she would probably have left it in their care; she had brought it to Paris simply because she did not know what else to do with it, and she valued the things it contained because they were associated with happy memories. In a word, all her theatrical properties were in that old box.

Rosamond had appeared but in few pieces. It was the time of "long runs," and as a fact she was identified in the memory of playgoers with but three characters; but before her days of triumph, in the beginning of her career, she had had to take subordinate parts, and it was of one of these she was thinking now.

From the corner of the box she took a grey wig, an old woman's dress, bonnet and mantle,



[THE BASKET OF HOthouse FRUIT.]

the latter artfully padded on the shoulders to hide her lissom, girlish figure; a rouge pot and a pencil changed her skin to the wrinkled ruddy complexion of hale old age; leaning on a gold-headed stick Rosamond surveyed herself with considerable satisfaction.

"No one would know me now. Why Reginald himself would pass me in the street!" and then she relocked the box, and calmly went downstairs.

Rosamond had told the Earl this was her first visit to Paris, but on this bright February day she displayed a wonderful acquaintance with it, supposing she had really only enjoyed the fashionable drives and promenades in which Lady Castleton had participated with her husband and his friends.

The old woman (as she appeared) walked briskly to the Arc de Triomphe, and then took an omnibus to Clichy; arrived at that suburb she strolled on till she came to a very inferior region. She still walked on until she reached a narrow, dingy street in which stood a dirty-looking shop, inscribed on the door in French,

M. Alphonse,
Professeur de la beauté.

She rapped twice with the rickety knocker, and a very slatternly female appeared, who though from long practice might speak French fluently enough, yet surely possessed sandy hair and freckles coloured nowhere but in Ireland.

"Is Mr. Alphonse at home?"

The woman started at hearing English, and answered in the same tongue.

"That depends who wants him."

"I do!"

The woman looked the stranger up and down.

"Are you a regular customer?"

"One of the best he ever had. Ah! I see he is at home; here, carry him this token."

She took from some hidden place a tiny silver fish, and gave it to the sandy-haired one.

"Here!" she said, "he will recognise it."

The woman slammed the door in the visitor's face, and retreated; she was back in two seconds.

"Alphonse will be proud to serve you, lady," she said, and led the way to an attic, where a dark, evil-looking man sat. The woman retired, and Rosamond sank into the only chair the room possessed.

"What can I do for you?" asked the man of many wonders a little curiously. "You are not going to tell me my work failed?"

"Oh! no, the scar has healed; you can hardly feel even a seam in the flesh."

"Good! and now you have fresh commands for me."

"I think so."

"It depends then—on what?"

"Your secrecy."

"You may reckon on that!" said Alphonse, quickly. "I don't say but what I do betray my clients sometimes, when it suits me; but I should never betray you. The money you paid me saved me from ruin, madam. I assure you, Sophie and myself would suffer any tortures rather than bring sorrow on the lady of the fish!"

It was their title for her; her true name they had never known.

"There is an old story," began Lady Castleton, slowly, "of a petition to a great person being found concealed in an apple. A lady—she was Empress of this very France—bought a basket of apples. In the first she opened a confession was found hidden. She examined the others, and found each one contained the same hidden paper. You observe, Alphonse," and my lady spoke with certain emphasis, "each apple contained the same thing. Whichever apple the Empress cut, the result would have been the same?"

"I observe."

"Make me a basket of apples."

"It is not the time of year for them. A

basket of hothouse pines, now, would be more seasonable."

"The name of the fruit matters nothing."

"And the petition?"

She took a tiny bottle from her pocket, and put it into his hand.

It was filled with a whitish powder, which, unlike most powders, consisted of separate grains, or particles.

"Three grains to each apple," said the lady, slowly. "And you must arrange the fruit while I wait."

"How long will you give me?"

She glanced at her watch.

"Two hours."

"It is a short time."

"I cannot make it longer. See," and she took a bank-note from her purse, "here is your price—fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds! It shall be done, madam!"

Sophie came back, and took the lady downstairs.

There was tea, served in a quaint china service, and wafery bread-and-butter.

Rosamond ate and drank almost eagerly. She knew that food was the best remedy for the awful faintness which crept over her.

"Madam is tired," said Sophie, pityingly. "Will she not lie down?"

Rosamond shook her head. A little, fair-haired child came in, whom Rosamond petted during the time she had to wait, but still the two hours seemed as long as twelve, but at length the door opened, and the man appeared.

He carried in his hand a tempting basket of hothouse fruit, grapes, pineapples, and such fruit, beautifully arranged, and bordered by long ferns, and green, trailing ivy.

He presented it to Rosamond with a low bow.

Taking it carefully from him, she handed him the note; and then, without a word to either husband or wife, rose, and walked out of the house.

(To be continued.)



[ROMEO AND JULIET IN REALITY.]

NOVELETTE.]

HIS SISTER'S CHILDREN.

—30:—

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Kate Nisbet married Silas Tudor, the young and consumptive Quaker, her brother vowed never to see her, or speak to her again. He had been very fond of his sister, though he had given her few proofs of his affection, being a taciturn man, apparently engrossed in adding shilling to shilling, and pound to pound.

Then, too, he was twenty years Kate's senior. Between him and her there had been twelve children, who had faded away, one by one, and now were forgotten, save when their grassy mounds spoke to Kate as she passed, on her way to church, of the uncertainty of life, and the long, long silence of death.

Eighteen years she lived with her brother, knowing no more of the man's inner life than an utter stranger, and her days were each so alike in their uniform dullness that there were times when she was tempted to run away from these old familiar scenes and associations.

Then Silas Tudor came to Thaxter, and all her life grew brighter. Against her brother's wishes or commands she met him frequently, and finding at length no entreaties would win his consent to their engagement, she left home one morning, and, after being quietly married, accompanied her bridegroom to Clare.

Here they lived in happy obscurity for five years; then Silas gradually faded away, and Kate watched by him with dim eyes and aching heart, wondering a little what she should do when he was gone from her.

Silas had no relations, and she dared not think "brother Tom" would do anything for her and her little ones.

Poor Kate! there was small need for anxiety with regard to herself. Just a week after her

husband's death she, too, laid down the burden of life, and folks said her malady was a broken heart.

Amongst her possessions the nurse found Mr. Nisbet's address, and at once telegraphed the news to him. That same night, as she sat talking with a friend, the door was opened and a stern-faced man entered.

"I am Thomas Nisbet," he said, in an uncompromising way, "and have come to make all necessary arrangements."

He did not ask to see Kate, he had not yet forgiven her opposition to his wishes; and when the nurse said,—

"I hope, sir, you will do something for the poor children," he started, and exclaimed,—

"Children! I did not know she left any. How many are there?"

"Two, sir, both girls."

"It's too bad," he said, sharply. "Why should I be burthened with other people's children? It is shameful! And of course Silas has no relatives who could assist?"

"None, sir; but I hope you won't think of letting the poor babes be left to the parish?"

"It's what I ought to do," he retorted.

"I'm not going to turn my home into a refuge for waifs and strays; and adopted children are invariably ungrateful."

But in the long and silent night conscience cried to this selfish, grasping man, and would not let him sleep. He thought of Kate, so pretty and winsome, and of his old secret pride in her, and the hard heart softened.

"I'll take them," he grumbled, "but I shall get small thanks for my pains. Girls too! I wonder what Keziah will say," for, to tell the truth, he stood somewhat in awe of his sharp-featured, sharp-voiced housekeeper.

But he held to his resolve, and when poor Kate had been laid to rest beside her husband, he took the children home with him. They were pretty and docile, and Prudence, the younger, was a small likeness of her mother;

Silence had the blue eyes and sweet seriousness of her father,

They grew and thrived at Thaxter, despite their dull surroundings and the acerbity of uncle and maid; and many of the good people would have been glad to receive them, but that Thomas Nisbet forbade the formation of any friendship, and, to guard against accidents, sent them to the Rectory, where they received a very unfashionable education, in accordance with his wishes.

Years came and went until Silence was twenty, and Prudence, or as she was called "Dency," two years younger, and still life dragged on monotonously, and the young men of Thaxter sighed vainly for introductions to the beautiful sisters.

Then there came a red-letter day for Dency. Coming towards her, as she loitered in the churchyard, she saw Mr. Mason, the rector, and with him a young fellow who was an entire stranger to her.

Mr. Mason looked whimsical as he introduced the pair, "Mr. Hurst, Miss Prudence Tudor," and a smile broke over the young man's face at the confusion he saw on hers.

"You're not going to carry the feud against me, Miss Tudor?" he said, gaily. "If my father and your uncle have chosen to quarrel surely we need not emulate their example."

Dency laughed nervously.

"Oh, no, Mr. Hurst; but I thought you would hardly like to know us after that horrid lawsuit. I heard Captain Hurst say he 'would root us out of the land' if he could; 'smite us hip and thigh,' just because uncle won the case."

"You must make allowance for an angry man," smiling down at the pretty flushed face. "And my father had never before experienced failure, which made it doubly hard to bear."

"You were planting flowers, Miss Dency," said the Rector, "and we have interrupted you!"

"Oh, no! I had quite finished, and was going home."

"Then I will walk with you if I may. Mr. Mason has some important engagement in the village, and I shall be thrown upon my own resources unless you take pity upon me."

Dency was somewhat nervous, and not a little afraid that on the homeward journey she might be confronted by her uncle. But she did not refuse to accept his escort; and, having shaken hands with the Rector, they passed out of the gate together.

"I'm afraid, Miss Tudor, you have a very poor opinion of the Hursts in general, and a worse one of my father?"

"No," she answered, frankly. "But I do think Captain Hurst was foolish to go to law about such a simple thing as the right of way through Thurston's field! He must have known he wouldn't win the day, and he has crippled himself all to no purpose."

Her companion looked rueful.

"We know that is our cost. But my father was not so much in the wrong as you seem to think. For years he had been in the habit of crossing that field on his way to the village; and no sooner was Thurston's dead, and the property in Mr. Nisbet's hands, than he found himself debarred from this privilege. You must confess it was a mean way of showing his spite."

"I do not see why uncle should have any 'spite' against Captain Hurst!"

"Don't you? Then you must be in ignorance of the past. It was because he wanted to marry my mother. But she preferred the poor sea-captain to Thomas Nisbet and his money."

"But I do not believe my uncle is rich," Dency said, surprisedly. "We do not live as though he is!"

"No, because he is a miserly—oh! I beg your pardon, Miss Trevor; I forgot I was talking to his near relative."

The girl broke into sudden laughter.

"I must beg your pardon too, for I fancy you must have drawn upon your imagination. It seems impossible Uncle Thomas should ever have loved any creature but himself."

"But it's a fact; and he was beside himself when he found his suit was useless, and swore he'd have revenge one way or another, soon or late; and, until the day of her death, my mother went in fear of him. But I see no reason why we should not be friends."

"Silence and I have no friends; they are forbidden luxuries," with a wistful smile.

"Silence is your sister, I suppose? That tall, lovely girl, with the serious eyes? I have seen her once or twice when I've been staying at home."

"Are you often at Thaxter? I do not remember seeing you before!"

"Not often. You see I spent seven years at Rugby, and the last two at Oxford; and the governor has usually taken me abroad in the vacations, so that I am a stranger almost in my birthplace. But I am going to remedy that now. You see 'Necessity has no choice,' and my father found his lawsuit so expensive that retrenchment is absolutely imperative."

"I am sorry," said Dency, lifting her brown eyes to the frank, boyish face, which broke into smiles.

"Why? Do you mean you are sorry I am to stay at Thaxter, or that our funds are low?"

"The latter, of course. Your stay here would not affect us in the least."

"I wish you were not so sure of that. I should like to feel we might be friends."

"That is so likely, Mr. Hurst. To mention your name only, would be to rouse uncle to a most surprising pitch of passion. And did I not tell you that we are forbidden to form any acquaintance?"

"Then I am to understand that you will 'cut me' if we chance to meet me after to-day?"

"I must if uncle is in view," regretfully; "it would be foolish to offend him or Keziah."

She is a power in the house, and I believe positively hates us."

"The dear soul! What a pity she can't be translated to a happier sphere! But do you spend all your days in that gloomy old house, with two cantankerous elders?"

"Oh! in the summer it isn't bad! Silence and I pass whole hours in the plantation, just beyond the garden (it's a mere apology for a garden), and we find it very pleasant. But the winter is simply awful, and we look forward to that with greatest dread."

"I shall come over to see you one morning if I may?"

"I wouldn't advise you to do so—for your own sake," the girl answered, trying to speak lightly. "I'm afraid your reception would be the reverse of polite."

"Oh! I shouldn't present myself at the front door," laughing. "I should simply cross from ours through Thurston's field to the plantation."

"You must not do that," quickly. "Don't you know my uncle would prosecute you?"

"I know he could, but I'll be very careful not to give him the chance"; and a spile of danger always gives more zest to an adventure. What! are you going to dismiss me here, Miss Tudor?"

"Yes; we are almost within sight of the house, and I'm not brave enough to risk a storm. I quite believe 'discretion' to be the better part of valour."

"Tee," laughing. "You make wisdom a substitute for courage. Well, if I must go, no more need be said on the subject. I am glad to have met you, Miss Tudor, and hope to continue our acquaintance. Good-bye."

A moment he held her hand in a close, cordial grasp, and looked with honest admiration into the sweet brown eyes. Then he was walking homewards; whilst Dency, flushed and trembling with a new vague pleasure, hurried in the opposite direction.

An old woman met her in the gloomy hall. "Your uncle wants you, Prudence," she said, in a harsh voice. "Where have you stayed so long?"

"I met Mr. Mason in the churchyard, and he detained me a little while," Dency answered, blushing vividly. "What does uncle want?"

"He said something about some papers you had not finished. Considering what you owe him, you should think no labour too great," and she glanced scowlingly after the pretty trim figure, until it disappeared through an open doorway.

The room Dency entered was furnished as an office, and contained three high stools, two of which were occupied now by Mr. Nisbet and Silence. The latter smiled faintly as her sister entered; but Mr. Nisbet said,—

"May I ask why your work was left in this condition?"

"My head ached too badly for work, uncle; so I went to the churchyard, hoping a walk would cure it."

"Your headaches are of frequent occurrence lately," fixing stern eyes upon her. "It would be well for you to understand that I do not tolerate whims and fancies. Go to your desk."

She obeyed in utter silence, and for the space of an hour nothing was heard but the scratching of pens over paper; then Mr. Nisbet closed his desk with a bang, and securing a packet of formidable looking documents, turned to Silence.

"If those agreements are copied fairly by three o'clock you may strike work"; and with neither look nor gesture of farewell went out to interview some poor wretch who had fallen into the clutches of this usurer to his own most bitter cost.

Poor Dency suddenly laid her face upon her desk and burst into bitter weeping, sobbing out she could not bear this life, and she wished she were dead, and out of it all. Silence went to her then, and lifting the pretty head drew it upon her breast, and spoke comfortingly, lovingly; and looking into the calm true eyes, Dency gradually regained courage and com-

posure, only an occasional sigh testifying to her discontent.

CHAPTER II.

It was a glorious day in July, and Mr. Nisbet being from home, and Keziah busy about the house, the sisters carried their work and a book to the plantation, prepared to spend a happy morning.

Silence held the precious volume close, as though afraid to lose her treasure. Books were scarce at Providence House; but, hunting one morning for a missing volume on law, she had discovered an old and dilapidated Shakespeare, which she immediately appropriated, and the girls found it a never-failing fountain of interest and admiration.

"What shall I read, Dency?" she asked, as the latter began stitching as though her life depended on the amount of work done this particular day. "Shall it be *Romeo and Juliet*; it is the next play in the index?"

"Then we will have it," promptly; "there is nothing like order in all things," with demure mockery of Thomas Nisbet's pompous tones.

So Silence began to read that world-known and saddest of love affairs; but she was not destined to make a conclusion this morning, for scarcely had she given voice to *Juliet's* lament at the discovery of her lover's identity,—

"My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy!"

when a rustling was heard amongst the bushes, and glancing swiftly up, the girls saw a large white hand parting the boughs and leaves, then a mischievous face, which laughed down upon them, whilst its owner asked,—

"May I come in?"

Silence guessed who the new-comer was from Dency's description, and she rose as the tall figure entered their bower, and stood glancing distressfully from her sister to the intruder.

"This is very foolish, Mr. Hurst," said Dency, a little tremulously, "if uncle were to find you here—"

"But he won't," interrupted the young fellow; "he has gone to Scriven. I heard him ask for his ticket not half-an-hour ago."

"But Keziah has not gone to Scriven."

"That's a shame," coolly; "but I don't think she is much given to rambling, so that we are comparatively safe. Please introduce me to Miss Tudor."

The introduction satisfactorily concluded, he said,—

"I am afraid you regard me with great disfavour, Miss Tudor; I shouldn't be surprised if you handed me over to the enemy at the earliest opportunity?"

He paused a moment, as though expecting some reply, but Silence was always slow of speech, and he went on,—

"I think after running such a risk just to exchange greetings I ought to be treated as a hero, and not a culprit. And if you knew how torrid it is at the Warren you would give me a more friendly welcome!"

"It is hot anywhere to-day," said Silence, with a slow, sweet smile.

"But hotter still where the governor has the gout, as mine has. And if I go within a dozen yards of him he shrieks for mercy on his foot. Won't you take pity on me, Miss Tudor, and give me leave to stay?"

One glance at Dency's flushed eager face rendered refusal impossible, and with a strange heart-sinking, Silence said,—

"Yes; but I must beg you not to venture here again!"

Perhaps he thought it assured well for his future success that Silence was so easily won to concession. He sat down close by Dency, whose work was now progressing very slowly.

"You were reading when I came on the scene," he said, addressing Silence, but looking at Dency. "Was the book very interesting?"

For answer Silence put the volume into his hands.

"Oh, Shakespeare! I'm afraid I'm not so well acquainted with him as I ought to be. I generally confine myself to novels, and of course you devour them?"

"Perhaps we should if we had the opportunity," Dency said, wistfully; "but there isn't such a thing as a romance in all Providence House."

"Might I lend you some? I've quite a small library at home."

"You are very kind," Dency began, with an eager glance at her sister, who shook her head, and said—

"That would entail another meeting, Mr. Hurst, and Dency would be as much the sufferer as you if it were discovered."

Roslyn Hurst's face fell.

"Couldn't I send them to you?"

"Yes; but they would be returned with a not too polite note, or worse still, thrown upon the fire. Dency, dear, you must be content without them."

She rose as she spoke, and walking to a little distance glanced anxiously towards the house, as though fearing Keziah's keen eyes would detect the presence of a visitor. Her absence gave Roslyn just the chance he wanted, and leaning nearer to Dency he said—

"If I came here to-morrow, quite early, would not you meet me and contrive to smuggle the books to your room?"

"I'm afraid Silence would not like it."

"Oh, she will not mind so long as Mr. Nisbet is none the wiser! Do come?"

She was so young, and life had been so dull to her always, kindness (save from Silence) so rare, that there is small wonder she yielded to his pleading.

"I will come," she said, scarcely above her breath; "but—but, I am afraid I shall be doing wrong!"

He had no time to reply, because Silence retraced her steps now and joined them.

"I thought perhaps Keziah was near," she explained, as she resumed herself, and glanced uneasily round. "She would be quite as great a foe to you as my uncle!"

"If I caught sight of the old lady in the distance I would make tracks, and you could swear I was a tramp," laughed Roslyn. "Is she very gullible?"

"Not at all, and you hardly have the appearance of a tramp!"

"Thank you, Miss Tudor! Now, I've a proposal to make. It seems such a jolly shame you girls should be cooped up like nuns, that I've thought of a little plan by which we may circumvent the powers that be. A fellow I know is coming to Thaxter to-morrow, and we shall row down the river for a few miles. Won't you join us? I guess you'd be safe, for I reckon Mr. Nisbet isn't much of an oarsman!" with a smile.

A hot flash rose to Silence Tudor's beautiful face.

"Mr. Hurst, you scarcely realize what you are asking us to do!" she said, in a hurt tone. "If you had sisters, would you care for any man to make such a proposal to them?"

"Under the circumstances I should say it was his duty!" coolly, but flushing too. "Miss Tudor, 'pon my word, I have never met ladies I esteemed more highly than I do yourself and Miss Dency!"

"Though we are 'old Nisbet's' money-lenders' nieces," with strange, new bitterness. "Mr. Hurst, we are duly grateful!"

The young fellow looked at her in distressful amazement.

"Oh, I say, how rough you can be! I am guiltless of all wish to offend, although I succeed only in offending."

"I beg your pardon," she said, with a return to her old sweet manner, "I spoke

too harshly, and yet not quite without a cause. Don't you know that men do not keep clandestine meetings with women they respect?"

"The exception proves the rule, you will say; but I don't quite agree with you!"

"I am the eldest; and must have thought both for Dency and myself," Silence answered, with sweet gravity. "There is no one else to care for us."

He was silent then, half-regretting that he had won Dency's promise to meet him; but when he glanced again at the shy, small face, he forgot regrets and wise resolves at once, and began eagerly to look forward to the morrow. But he did wonder a little, as he went home, what the irascible captain would say could he know how and where he had spent the golden hours.

Of course Dency kept her word, although in fear and trembling, and she managed, too, to smuggle her books in unseen. Silence looked grave when she heard the story, and, for the first time in her life, Dency told her sister but half the truth, saying nothing of the promise given to meet Roslyn Hurst again the following morning. Poor little Dency! She was choosing as her mother did before her, and would not see what shoals and rocks were ahead.

And so it went on from day to day, until Dency grew almost bold, having so long eluded her uncle's vigilance; and then one morning she went to Silence with flushed face and sweet wet eyes, and confessed all the truth—and how an hour ago she had promised to marry Roslyn Hurst.

"Oh! my dear; oh! my dear," cried the elder girl, "no good will come of this! Neither uncle nor Captain Hurst will ever consent to an engagement. You poor child! If you must love, why should it be our enemy's son?" and so fell to kissing the pretty face with a touching and almost motherly tenderness.

"Oh! do not be afraid for me," Dency said, clinging affectionately to her; "Roslyn will take care of me, and Captain Hurst is a kind-hearted man, and will forgive us."

"But uncle will not; and if he discovers your secret, have you thought what your life will be for the next three years?"

"Roslyn would not leave me so long in misery," with an almost pathetic trust in her boy lover. "We would be married long before three years were gone."

"But, my dear! you cannot marry without uncle's consent until you are twenty-one! Oh! Dency, I am afraid for you. It was not manly of Roslyn Hurst to act thus. He knows he is laying up certain misery for you."

"He loves me!" the girl answered, drawing a little from her sister, "and would never willingly give me one hour's pain. And, Silence, you cannot understand this thing well, because you have never been in love."

She spoke with such a quaint assumption of dignity that Silence broke into a little, low laugh.

"You have had so much experience, pretty one! Don't misunderstand me, Dency. I do not grudge you your happiness, but I fear what the future may hold for you. Does Captain Hurst know of his son's imprudence?"

"That doesn't sound very flattering to me," with a saucy smile. "You speak as though I am a female 'detritmental.' No; Roslyn will say nothing to him until he leaves Oxford; he will get his degree next June, and then—and then all will be well with us. Silence dear, won't you wish us happiness?"

"With all my heart; and you must teach me to look on the bright side. And pray, Mistress Dency, when Roslyn gets his degree, upon what do you propose living?"

"He will get a second master's place in a big school, of course, and even if Captain Hurst does not allow us anything, we shall do very well, because I have no extravagant tastes. Silence, you shall live with us, and have heaps of lovers, and you shall marry the grandest and richest of them all. Oh! we

will give you such good times that you think the millennium has come in deadly earnest."

Silence smiled, but sighed too, then said, "I hope these very dangerous meetings are not to continue until October? You cannot hope to escape detection."

"Oh, we will be very cunning," laughing and blushing. "We shall not always meet in the plantation. Do you know, Silence, I feel so brave this morning, I could almost invite him into the garden, only it is in such a condition, that I should be ashamed. There isn't a decent path or bed to be seen."

"I am glad you still have a little discretion remaining."

"Oh! I intend deserving my name. And now, Silence, you dear, discreet creature, I am going to ask an immense favour of you. Roslyn's friend has come to Thaxter, and, having business here, has preferred to take rooms at the Blue Boar rather than go up to the Warren. And Roslyn thought it would be pleasant down the river to-day, with you and Mr. Embury to play propriety. He is quite old—thirty, I believe—and you are as staid as Keziah."

"But, Dency—"

"But me; no buts!" as you read yesterday. Say you will go; don't refuse me this one favour, Silence?"

She looked so entreating, so winsome, that the elder sister hesitated before speaking, and, of course, in that moment's hesitation lost. When they went downstairs together Silence had given the required promise, and it was agreed that if Mr. Nisbet did not need their services that afternoon they should meet Messieurs Embury and Hurst half-a-mile below the Warren.

CHAPTER III.

MR. NISBET did not require his nieces' services, and, further, gave them permission to walk where they would until five, the hour for tea.

So, having dressed (the one in fear and trembling, the other full of passionate delight), they left Providence House behind, and started for the meeting-place.

"I wish," said Dency, with a disparaging glance at her clean, but somewhat coarse holland gowns, "I wish I looked a little more presentable. It must be nice to have pretty clothes. I am afraid Roslyn will be ashamed to present us to Mr. Embury!"

"Let us hope he values you too highly to think of your dress," Silence said, cheerfully. "And as for Mr. Embury, we need not mind him, he being so mere a stranger."

"Roslyn says he is very clever and handsome."

"How lucky he is to combine the two things!"

And then they fell into a long silence, which was broken at last by Dency saying,—

"There is the boat, and Roslyn is coming to meet us."

"You are delightfully punctual!" said the young fellow, as he shook hands. "I did not expect you so early."

"We must be equally punctual in our return, unless you wish scouts to be sent in search of us," laughed Dency, who was just developing traits of archness, to the surprise of her sister.

"Miss Tudor, you are very good to come. I was afraid you would discountenance such proceedings."

Silence smiled sadly.

"I do, Mr. Hurst; but I could not allow Dency to come alone. Oh! if you care for her, as you say you do, you will not persuade her to secrecy."

He looked distressed and confused.

"What else can we do whilst our elders are so very much at loggerheads? Can't you trust me, Miss Silence? Upon my honour, I would rather give her her freedom than endanger her happiness!"

"It is too late to think of that now," broke in his pretty *fiancée*. "And, Silence, please put on your holiday mood. Just for one day let us all be happy together."

There was small chance for further speech, as Thornton Embry came forward to meet them.

"I had no idea," he said, as he placed himself beside Silence, "I had no idea that the Mr. Nisbet I am to see to-morrow was uncle to Miss Dency until an hour ago. Roslyn's information quite startled me!"

"You know my uncle?"

"No, I don't; but I have an appointment with him to-morrow. One of my clients has got into a muddle with money matters, and I am to help him out if I can."

"You will please say nothing of our excursion to him. I dislike asking you to assist us in this deceit; but it is for my sister's sake."

He glanced quickly and keenly into the troubled, beautiful face, the true eyes, then said,—

"I will keep the secret inviolate, Miss Tudor," and gave her his hand whilst she entered the boat.

It was such a glorious day, so cool under the shade of weeping willows and beech.

Both carmen were in capital form, and even Silence forgot much of her fear in the delicious languor of utter enjoyment.

"This will be a red-letter day in our calendar," Dency said, smiling. "I shall remember it when I am quite old and grey, because it is the first real holiday we have ever had!"

"You shall have as many as you please in future," Roslyn broke in, eagerly. "It's a beastly shame to keep you cooped up like a couple of nuns. I would mutiny!"

"Even if mutiny made matters worse?" questioned Silence. "Wouldn't that be rather foolish policy? Trust me, Mr. Hurst, submission is best in this case."

He did not look convinced, and Thornton, seeing a shadow rest upon the girl's fair face, began to talk of indifferent things in a bright, amusing way, leaving the lovers free to exchange soft speech and tender glance.

They rowed about three miles, then Thornton proposed getting out and spending an hour in an adjacent wood.

"It will be pleasant," Silence said, stepping out. "And I should suppose you need some rest after such exertion."

"It is hot work in such weather. Now let me find you a comfortable seat somewhere. It seems to me our young lovers have just gone off at a tangent."

They soon discovered the trunk of a tree, upon which Silence disposed herself, whilst Embry stretched his limbs at ease upon the long, ripe grass.

"How still it is here! What a delicious change from the hot streets of London! I wonder how you would bear transplanting?" with a glance at the dainty figure and fresh, sweet face.

"Badly, I'm afraid. The noise of city life would confuse and scare one. You see," as if in apology, "we have lived here so many years. But though you think Thaxter and its surroundings lovely now, you would have quite another opinion of them if you came in winter."

"I suppose I should, being town-bred, Miss Tudor. I am afraid our young friends are acting very foolishly. From all I can learn of Mr. Nisbet, he is not a likely man to look very favourably on a love-stuit, especially when the suitor is his enemy's son; and Captain Hurst is very choleric."

The fair, pure face, grew very sad.

"I don't know what to do or say," she said, slowly. "I hate to hurt Dency by refusing to keep her secret, and I really like Mr. Hurst. But I am quite sure my uncle will discover all at no distant date, and the results will be very terrible."

"You think intercession would be useless?"

"I am sure it would. He would never forgive Dency for forming an attachment un-

known to him. He never forgave my mother because she married where he did not wish!"

"Then it's a black look-out for our friends. I wish I saw my way clear to help them. And, Miss Tudor, may I speak quite openly to you without fear of offending?"

"I shall be glad if you will. I am so bewildered as to right and wrong."

"I know," kindly, "duty calls you to do this, but love urges that upon you. Will you believe me, when (speaking from bitter experience) I say no good ever can or ever does come from deceit, however harmless it may seem? 'To do evil that good may come' is a poor way of setting matters straight. The best thing Roslyn can do is to make a clean breast of it to his father. He is hasty, but passionately fond of his son, and would scarcely hold out long against him, even in this thing; and if it is represented to Mr. Nisbet that your sister will be no longer a burden and expense to him, from pecuniary motives alone his consent might be won."

Silence shook her head.

"You do not know my uncle," was all she said, but her look and voice spoke volumes.

"Still, for your sister's sake, he should be told the truth. It will be worse for her if he learns it through a third party."

"I feel that too; and he would say, justly, she owed him both obedience and gratitude, because he stood between us and pauperism. He has been hard to us always, but he has given us a share in his house and can exact duty. Oh! I wish Mr. Hurst had never returned, for Dency's sake."

She bowed her face on her hands a moment, whilst the man at her feet regarded her pitifully, then he said,—

"Between now and to-morrow I will talk the matter over with Roslyn, and if we come to any satisfactory conclusion I will contrive to let you hear it. Now, try to forget this gloomy subject; the truants are returning, and they must not find us with melancholy faces."

He sprang up as he spoke, standing tall and strong before her, and his very presence seemed to give her the strength she so sorely needed. The dark, somewhat sallow face was instinct with courage and determination; the brown eyes honest; the mouth proud and firm.

Silence thought that this man had the making of a hero in him, and was intensely grateful that he should so interest himself in Dency's welfare.

The homeward journey was pleasant, but all too short, and Roslyn would have lingered long over his farewell, but Silence hurried Dency away, saying that it was nearly five, and it would not do to rouse their uncle's suspicions.

"Oh!" cried the latter, when they were well on their way to Providence House, "hasn't this afternoon been good? I wished it would never end."

The elder sister scarcely seemed to hear, and Dency went on,—

"Is not he nice?"

"Who is nice?"

"Why, Mr. Embry? Oh! Silence, I wish you were as happy as I!"

Silence blushed at her too palpable inference, but answered, quietly,—

"He is very kind and good, I think; and a wise adviser to Roslyn."

No more was said until they reached their room; then Silence suddenly took her sister into a warm and close embrace.

"Little Dency! little Dency! may Heaven make you happy!" and being more moved than she cared to show, turned hastily, and went down to the dreary sitting-room, where tea was already spread.

Mr. Nisbet glanced at her as she entered, but said nothing until the meal was nearly ended, then broke the uncomfortable silence suddenly by remarking,—

"To-morrow we shall have a visitor, so dinner will be postponed until six to suit his convenience. I never had time to keep fashionable

hours myself, but it is different with young men now. You will help Keziah in her preparations, and may dine with us, as I shall want you to amuse Embry whilst I prepare some accounts for him. You, Prudence, will dine at the usual hour."

"Very well, uncle!" so cheerfully, that he was surprised. Visitors at Providence House were so few that the girl might easily be pardoned if she were anxious to meet any stranger who might break in upon the dull level of their life.

"I want you to provide a good meal, but not an expensive one," he said. "Embry moves in the best society, I believe," and went from the room before the vivid blush had died from Silence's cheek.

"Oh!" cried Dency, "I do hope you will enjoy the evening, and that Mr. Embry will be pleased with you; though he can hardly fail to be that, you beautiful, sedate darling! And perhaps he will bring me a note from Roslyn."

"I wonder why uncle wishes me to entertain Mr. Embry?" said the other, in a distressed way. "Oh, Dency, I cannot help distrusting all he does; wondering what motive he has, what end he is striving to gain. Sometimes I think I must be bad indeed to suspect evil without any apparent cause."

"Oh, he hasn't any motive in this. And as for being suspicious one cannot help it in this atmosphere. Silence, make yourself look very nice to-morrow!"

But this was exactly what Silence did not intend doing. She went down the following day dressed in a sober brown gown, devoid of trimming, and almost Quakerish in its simplicity. She had no ornaments, and would not even wear a flower at her breast.

But whilst she was doing her best to beautify the table her uncle entered, and, after staring exhaustively at her, said savagely,—

"Do you propose meeting Embry in that fashion? Don't you know that he is a man of property and family? The girl who gets him for a husband will be lucky; and you are of a marriageable age now!"

"Uncle," she began, in an imploring tone, but he stopped her with a curt,—

"No arguments!" then added, "You cannot expect me to maintain you always; naturally I wish to see you settled. Go up and change your dress."

Slowly she returned to her room, a wild revolt in her heart. To her it seemed monstrous to trick herself out to win a man's love or fancy; to lay traps for his unwary feet.

"Oh!" she said, with a sudden passion foreign to her, "He would sell me to the archfiend himself so long as he had money. How shall I meet him? How shall I meet him with the knowledge of what is expected of me?"

The flush of shame still lingered on the fair cheek, the indignant light was still in the beautiful eyes, when the door opened and Keziah entered, with a few clusters of crimson geraniums, which by some chance yet remained in the garden.

"He says you're to wear them, and make haste down," she said gruffly, and disappeared.

With trembling hands Silence fastened the flowers at her throat and waist, and then went down, ashamed, miserable, but beautiful. Her blue cotton gown fitted her to a nicety, and the delicate colour served to enhance the fairness of her skin, the warm gold of her hair, the deep blue of her eyes.

Thornton Embry was fairly startled when he saw her standing in the doorway. He had thought her beautiful yesterday, but to-day she was exquisite. Thomas Nisbet saw his admiration with secret triumph.

"This is my niece Silence," he said, in a voice which was strange to the girl, because of its amiability. "Silence, my dear, let me introduce Mr. Thornton Embry."

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGHOUT the meal Mr. Nisbet retained his suave manner, only frowning at Silence

when he could safely do so without attracting Thornton's notice. Never had the girl shown to less advantage. She scarcely spoke, never unless first addressed, and her manner towards their guest was cold in the extreme.

Dessert having been discussed she went to the dining, disused drawing-room, and sat down near an open window, waiting for the coming trial. Very soon she heard her uncle's voice, then a deeper one responding briefly.

"We can offer you but poor entertainment, sir, being homely people, but my niece will do her best. In the meanwhile I will get Lawson's accounts ready, and you will look them over at your leisure."

"Thanks."

And then Silence saw her new acquaintance enter the room leisurely, with his head well thrown back and a bored expression on his handsome face.

"Your uncle has given me into your charge, Miss Tudor," he said, advancing to her, and looking down with grave dark eyes at the girl. "How do you propose amusing me?"

"I have not the slightest idea what is your notion of amusement," she answered, frigidly. A puzzled look crossed his face.

"What is the matter, Miss Tudor? Have I offended you in some unknown way since yesterday?"

"No, Mr. Embry."

"Is your sister in trouble? I was afraid so when she did not appear at table."

"No, she is quite well and happy."

"Then what is distressing you?" he asked, a note of real sympathy in his voice.

She suddenly put up her hands as if to hide her confusion from him, but let them fall again before her, only saying in a hurried, agitated way—

"Do not ask me, please; it is something I cannot tell you."

"I am sorry, as I hoped I might give you assistance!"

And at the pity in his tone her whole manner softened and changed.

"I beg your pardon for my rudeness, but I am so wretched and—and so ashamed!"

"Say no more," he answered, gently. "I was wrong to wish to force your confidence, and deserved snubbing. Now, if you are quite sure that I am forgiven I will tell you the result of my talk with Roslyn. First, here is a note for your sister; I had grave doubts about bringing it, but yielded to Roslyn's persuasions. I may tell you that I have so far succeeded in convincing him that his present line of conduct is neither honourable nor manly, that he has promised to open proceedings both with the Captain and Mr. Nisbet in the course of three weeks."

"But why does he insist on three weeks' delay?"

"Well, first of all, he has been trying for a prize of some value, and will know the results of his trial on the twenty-seventh of September, on which day he attains his majority. And he thinks the Captain will hardly refuse him any favour under the circumstances; he counts confidently on success."

"I see; and he will bribe his father to receive Dency?" with unconscious bitterness. "But if he would make my uncle a party to the engagement, he must show him it is to his own benefit to consent."

"Then I will warn him to get all his best arguments to the fore!" smiling; "and no doubt your sister will give him hearty support. She is very pretty!"

"Is she not?" warmly. "I often wonder she is not a favourite with uncle, because everyone who knew my mother says that Dency is so exactly like her in ways and appearance. Mr. Embry, is Captain Hurst very formidable?"

"To a stranger, yes; but his bark is much worse than his bite, and when once his sympathy is aroused he is the staunchest and most generous of men!"

"And he could hardly fail to like and pity Dency," she said musingly. "I will try to be more hopeful."

"That is a wise resolution. Now, Miss Tudor, Roslyn told me what a lamentable dearth of books there was at Providence House, so I ventured to bring you two little volumes," drawing them from his capacious pockets. "The one is Wendell Holmes's *Professor at the Breakfast Table*, the other *Idylls of the King*. May I leave them with you?"

The look in her eyes answered him more eloquently than words. She took the books from him and held them in an almost caressing clasp.

"You are very kind!" was all she said, but he was satisfied.

"When you have read those I will bring you some more. It is culpable wickedness to exist without books," he ended, with a laugh.

"Do you intend staying long at Thaxter?" she asked, in some surprise.

"I shall stay until Roslyn knows his fate; and I am killing two birds with one stone—recruiting my health, and doing a little business at the same time."

They sat talking until the long, long shadows across the desolate garden warned them it was growing late; and so well had Thornton interested her that Silence had forgotten all her shame, her uncle's plots, until he entered the room.

"Here are the accounts; they are rather complicated, but I daresay they will be clear enough to you, sir. And if you have time to go through them to-night I shall be glad to see you in the morning to make final arrangements. But you fully understand I shall not go from my terms?"

"That, of course; and I'll see you between eleven and twelve. Now, I think I must thank you for your hospitality, and wish you good-night!"

"I'm afraid you have had a very long dull time," Nisbet said, deprecatingly.

"On the contrary, I have spent a most pleasant evening, thanks to Miss Tudor."

"You will be a welcome guest at any time."

Thornton wheeled round and regarded his host keenly a moment, then said quietly—

"I shall be glad to avail myself of the privilege, but I think it only just to tell you I am on intimate terms with Captain Hurst."

"The old scoundrel!" broke out Nisbet but Thornton stayed the angry flow of word, by a gesture.

"My dear sir, he entertains an equally high opinion of you; but I do not see that my acquaintance with him should affect our amicable relations."

"Neither do I," Nisbet said eagerly. "We will agree to taboo the subject entirely."

"With all my heart, Mr. Nisbet. Your niece has been telling me a great many anecdotes of her sister; may I not hope to see her too, on some future occasion? It seems scarcely fair that she should remain in exile because of me."

Nisbet glanced suspiciously at him, but the handsome face wore a supremely unconscious look, and he answered—

"She is such a mere child that I think it wiser she should see little society at present, but I will remember your wish."

He bowed his guest out with great *empressment*, and returning to Silence said, in his ordinary manner—

"You did pretty well at the finish, but you began badly. Let me have no more displays of temper. It will be better for you to marry whilst you have a chance, because I'm an old man and may not live long. What would you do in the event of my death? I tell you plainly, I've nothing to leave you."

She was wiser than Dency, and knew that he was lying to her, but in her pain and humiliation she made no answer, nor did he expect one.

"If you want any ribbons or fineries that are not too expensive, you had better get them at once. Some men like to see a woman dressed like the Queen of Sheba."

"Uncle," she said, tremulously. "I cannot obey you in this thing?"

He burst into a sardonic laugh.

"You won't be so mad as to defy me?" he said.

"Go up to your room and learn wisdom." She said no more, but went quietly out, to spend the long night in bitter thoughts. With the morning came Thornton, and after that he was a daily visitor, and Silence understood too well what the manoeuvres meant which were used to call Dency from her side, and suffered accordingly.

But she scarcely understood yet what was this new, strange feeling, as much allied to pain as pleasure, which thrilled her when Thornton's voice was heard in the hall, or when his hand touched hers. She grew afraid to question her own heart in those days, fearing what the answer might be.

She was not slow to notice a gradual change in him, a restlessness foreign to his nature, sudden fits of moody abstraction, the explanation of which must soon be given.

The three weeks were slipping fast away, the day of his departure was very near, and Silence dared not think what life would be when he was gone.

It was a terrible shock to her, when, one morning, he announced his intention of leaving Thaxter the following day. She bent her head very low over her work, whilst she said in a voice, less steady than it should have been—

"But Mr. Hurst's birthday is not yet come."

Thornton paced to and fro, to and fro, not daring to look at her. Remembering the barrier which he himself had raised between them, he had suddenly determined to go away, fearing that she might learn to regard him as he, to his bitter cost, regarded her. Oh! how he cursed the boyish folly which had made him lay waste his life, which now came between him and happiness! Suddenly he paused in his steady tramp, and looked down at the girl with such love, such yearning, such regret, that she rose and stretched out her hand to him.

"You are in trouble; tell me if I can help you?"

Hb!p him, oh dear Heaven! none could do that, and she least of any. The dark face was instinct with agony, the teeth set fast, the veins on the broad brow knotted and swollen.

"How can I help you?" Silence asked again, and a groan broke from him.

"I have put it out of your power to help me," he said, in a hoarse voice. "Silence, I meant to go away without speaking, holding my secret close, but in justice to you I must speak now. I told you no good could come of deceit, and yet all the while I was deceiving all of you. I posed as a single man, but I have had a wife these eleven years."

He paused, heartstricken at the horror and anguish on the beautiful face; but in a moment Silence rallied.

"Tell me all," she said, so gently, and so quietly, he was surprised.

"It is a short story, replete with boyish folly and a man's treachery; not an uncommon story by any means. When you have heard it you will scarcely wonder I spoke as I did with regard to Roslyn and Dency. I was only nineteen when I spoiled all my life by my own mad folly. It was when I first went to Oxford, and the woman I thought I loved was my private tutor's daughter, and seven years my senior. She was neither beautiful nor clever, but I thought her both, and made no secret of my passion. Well, her father encouraged me in every conceivable way, and finally we became engaged. Then he began to hint that such a match would be distasteful to my friends, and if I really loved his daughter my only course was to marry her secretly. I did not need much persuasion, and my fiancée acquiesced in all I proposed. So we were married, and three months later I discovered I had been basely tricked; that my wife was subject to periodical attacks of insanity, each one of longer duration than its predecessor. Then I made a clean breast of the matter to my father, who treated me with a generosity

I did not deserve; my tutor was silent for his own sake, and so my *fiasco* never leaked out. When my wife left the Sanatorium she went to her parents and remained with them until five years since, when she was declared hopelessly and for ever insane."

"Where is she now?" came from the girl's white lips.

"In a private asylum."

"Poor soul!"

"Silence, you know why I have told you this? You know why I have determined to go so suddenly? You see, I thought I was strong, but have found myself weak? Tell me, what shall I do? Go or stay?"

"You must go; there is nothing else left you to do."

"Will you forgive me the deceit I have practised? Will you forgive me if I have hurt you?"

She smiled bravely into his face. "I have nothing to forgive—but go now."

He took her slender hands in his, and looked down into her dear eyes, with bitter agony in his own. "There is no more to say, Silence?"

"No more," she answered steadily; "unless it is good-bye."

"Good-bye!" he echoed mechanically, and wringing her hands turned desolately away; and when she could see him no longer she fell on her knees crying wildly, "Heaven forgive me that I love him; and Heaven help him!" but could not weep in her bitter despair.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Thomas Nisbet heard that Thornton had left Thaxter without proposing for Silence his anger knew no bounds, and believing the blame of this to rest with Silence, he made the days immediately following very wretched and hard to bear. At last, in a fit of desperation, the girl flashed upon him.

"I did not intend disclosing what Mr. Embry evidently wishes to remain a secret, but, to prevent a repetition of this scene, let me tell you at once—he is already married!"

"How long have you known this?" with ominous calm. "From the very first?"

"No; I was as ignorant of it as you until the hour of his departure."

"Then why have you chosen to keep your own counsel since?" with an oath.

She made no answer, but turned wearily from him, the pain growing greater in her beautiful eyes; and when Nisbet indulged in a tirade against Thornton, hurling sundry unsavoury epithets at him, she scarcely seemed to hear; and annoyed by her demeanour he flung out of the room, swearing he would have neither overt nor covert defiance in his house.

Silence listened to the sound of his retreating steps; then, with a sigh, turned to her work, and presently Dency came in, flushed and smiling.

"Am I late?" she said, throwing aside hat and gloves, and beginning to turn the leaves of a heavy ledger. "Bl, do you know to-morrow is the twenty-seventh."

"Yes, I know!"

"I wish it were over; I begin to feel most horribly frightened. Why! where has Keziah been," she added, looking from the window and seeing the woman crossing the garden. "Not to the plantation, I hope."

"I think not; she would look more triumphant if she had. I believe it is the delight of her heart to get us into disgrace," Silence said wearily, and went on once more with her writing.

The dull morning wore away slowly enough, and the sisters were unusually quiet, both being busy with her own thoughts. At noon they heard Thomas Nisbet return, but it was fully half-an-hour later before he joined them. Then he walked to the window, which faced Dency's desk, and taking up a position there stood glowering down upon her. She was conscious of his steady gaze, and at last with

an effort lifted her eyes to his, and at what she saw in them, cried aloud "Oh, uncle! uncle!" and cowered down as though fearing a blow. He neither moved nor spoke for a moment, and Silence went quickly to her sister's side, her face as white as though Death had set his mark there.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked at last, in a low, harsh voice.

Dency seemed incapable of replying, and Silence answered for her. "Nearly three months," and laid her hands protectively upon her sister's shoulders.

"So you were in the conspiracy too! I might have known it. This is the reward I receive for my benevolence, the charity of sixteen years," with a terrible oath.

"Speak Dency!" urged Silence. "Speak now for yourself and Roslyn."

With her head still bent the girl said rapidly, "He would have come to you before, but we were afraid you would refuse your consent, because of your hatred of his father. He is coming to-morrow."

"He would be wise to alter his mind," with a fierce smile, and suddenly advancing brought his fist heavily down upon the desk. "Do you believe I would consent to any prayer of any Hurst? I hate them! I hate them!" furiously; "and if I knew it would break your heart to lose this gay gallant, I would not alter my conduct. You have chosen to disgrace your name and my house by clandestine meetings with a fellow who cannot, and will not, make you his wife, and in future Keziah will be your companion. You will be completely under her control, her surveillance. And if you attempt another meeting with Roslyn Hurst I will thrust you out of my house to starve or beg as you may."

The man's manner was terrible; his eyes glared wildly, his face was crimsoned with rage, and the thin lips, drawn tightly back from his gleaming teeth, gave a tigerish expression to his features.

"Uncle!" said Silence, when his voice had died out, "for motives of economy you would have given me to the first man who proposed for my hand. Does not the motive hold good in this case?"

"No!" he thundered. "I swore to punish that fellow Hurst for his insolence, and I will do it!"

Dency looked up with a little spurt of courage.

"That is not the reason for your hatred. I know that you loved Mrs. Hurst, but she would not listen to you."

She had touched that never-to-be-healed wound with a rough hand, and in the pain and fury of the moment Nisbet was beside himself.

With an imprecation he leaned forward and struck the fair cheek smartly. The effect upon Prudence was strange. She rose with a quiet dignity wholly new in her.

"That is enough, uncle. From to-day I owe you no obedience, no duty—I defy you!" and she went swiftly from the room, her eyes blazing with outraged pride and anger.

But when Silence attempted to follow Nisbet barred her way, and she was compelled to listen in utter helplessness to his wild and profane language.

"Uncle," she said, at last, "my sex should protect me from this outrage." And taking courage as she saw he listened, "Let us go away from here. You have never loved us, have always regarded us as encumbrances, and it is bitter, indeed, to eat the bread of charity given so grudgingly. I am strong, and in some way can earn my livelihood, and Prudence will find shelter at The Warren."

He stopped her with a violent gesture.

"Until you attain your majority I am your guardian. You are free to do as you please in the course of a few months; but Prudence remains with me for two years longer! If you choose to go, you leave her behind!"

"You bind me hand and foot!" the girl said, passionately. "I dare not leave her to your mercy." Then, with sudden entreaty,

"Uncle, grant me this one thing—let Dency be happy in her own way, and with the man she has chosen, and I will obey you in all things. She is so delicate, so tender, she cannot bear sorrow—grief killed my mother."

"Go to your desk!" he said, sternly, "and let me hear no more of this folly," and, seeing resistance was useless, she obeyed; turning to her task with a heart as heavy as lead.

Then Nisbet wrote a curt and uncivil note to Captain Hurst, giving him sufficient explanation of Roslyn's conduct, and ending thus—

"If I should see your son trespassing, or hear he has been trespassing on my property, I shall proceed against him."

There was a great scene between the choleric Captain and his son that night, and, but for the great love each bore the other, a violent quarrel must have been the result.

Roslyn pleaded his passion for Dency well and warmly, and endeavoured to interest his father in her, but vainly.

"She is one of the Nisbet brood," said the old man, "and they are all alike. You had better hang yourself than marry into such a family!" and from this opinion he would not swerve.

The poor young fellow was at his wits' end, and could arrive at no decision with regard to what was best for Dency. See her he must; but when and where?

Nisbet had plainly said she was a prisoner in the house, and any attempt to communicate with her would only increase her discomfort.

He passed the night in a perfect agony of anxiety, and when morning dawned he had still found no way out of his trouble. But noon brought him a letter from Silence.

It so happened that sundry small articles were required in the house, and as Keziah dared not leave her poor little prisoner unguarded, Silence was sent to the village shop, and before going she contrived to write to Roslyn, trusting to the kindness of the shop-keeper to carry it to him.

Mrs. Bowtell was only too delighted to serve one of the "young ladies," and when Silence blushing produced her note, and said she could not pay the messenger, as her uncle did not make her any allowance, the woman answered, cheerily—

"Don't speak of it, miss; I'm sure it will be a labour of love. I am very glad to do you a service, and you may rest assured that I shall say nothing about it to any creature. I will carry it to The Warren myself."

Silence thanked her warmly, and went home light of heart; for surely, she thought, Roslyn will contrive in some way to comfort her.

She had told him that Prudence was quite ill with grief and anxiety, and that unless he sent her some reassuring message she was afraid to think what this might mean for her. That all direct communication was impossible, and concluded by asking if he loved Dency well enough to invade the premises at night, and place a note amongst the boughs of ivy growing beneath her own window, she would keep watch for him, and would secure the message before the house was astir.

Roslyn needed no second entreaty. Sitting by her open window at midnight, Silence heard the stealthy step along the untidy paths, and leaning out saw the young man below.

She dared not speak lest the wakeful Keziah should hear, but she lit her lamp and made signs that she had seen him, and pointed out the best spot in which to secrete his letter: then, by a gesture enjoining caution, turned the light low, and watched with eager, anxious eyes until he had entered the plantation, and so was lost to her sight.

Early in the morning she stole downstairs, and finding the letter with little difficulty, she re-entered the house, and, locking the door, went up to her room.

As Dency was most unmistakably ill, she was permitted to take her breakfast upstairs, and Keziah being busy, bade Silence carry it to her; so she had no difficulty in performing her errand, but dared not stay to hear what com-

fort Roslyn offered; only when Dency came down at noon she noticed that the girl seemed feverish and excited.

She ate little, and preserved silence throughout the meal, and appeared almost unconscious of her uncle's angry regard.

And in this fashion a few days passed, the poor prisoner making no complaint, and seeming careless to regain her liberty, so that even Keziah was lulled into a sense of security.

"You won't have much trouble with her," she said to Nisbet; "she hasn't courage enough to stand against you. It's my opinion that she'll promise to give him up, or she'll die!"

Even he was startled by the woman's heartlessness, and thought of Kate's untimely end with something like horror.

"If you had been there to comfort her, perhaps she might have lived," whispered conscience, accusingly. And do what he might he could not still the small voice, or still the vague remorse in his hard heart.

The next day Dency declared herself too ill to leave her room, and indeed she looked so. Her poor little face was pinched and wan, her eyes sunken, and her whole manner indicative of lassitude.

Nisbet so far softened towards her as to allow Silence to spend the morning with her, but as Keziah was continually hovering outside, they had small chance for much conversation.

Dency sat in an easy chair, her hand held fast in her sister's, and a look of contentment in her eyes.

"How nice it is to have you to myself again; and, Silence, how good it was of you to get me that note! It has comforted me so much; before it came I was just ready to die of despair!"

Silence answered by kissing the wan face, and pressing the alim hand closer.

"You are as good as a mother to me," said the girl, rubbing her cheek against her sister's. "I should have been quite lost without you, you brave old darling!"

Then Keziah returned, and deep quiet fell upon them. And after dinner Silence went away to her work, at which she sat steadily until three.

Her uncle was away at Scriven, where he usually spent one day in seven, and the house seemed very quiet—so quiet, indeed, that she was very much startled when the door opened and Dency entered, dressed as though for walking.

She was white and trembling, but there was an air of resolution about her which astonished Silence.

"Kiss me, dear," she said, coming forward; "I am going out."

"Dency, my dear, what madness is this? You are unfit for exertion of any kind, and your absence will be discovered!"

"I don't care; I shall die if I stay up there by myself!" rooklessly. "I must see Roslyn again, and Keziah is busy below with an old crony. Good-bye, dear," and she looked wistfully into her sister's face.

"If you will go," Silence said, sorrowfully, "I am powerless to prevent you. Good-bye!"

With a strength which seemed born of desperation, Dency hurried from the room out of the house, through the garden; and then, sighing, Silence sat down, wondering what the next hour would bring forth, and praying passionately her sister's absence might remain unnoticed.

CHAPTER VI.

DENCY held on her way steadily, although her small strength was almost spent; and, having passed through the plantation, turned to give one last look towards the house. She was not pursued; and, taking heart of grace, she pressed forward until she was close to the Warren; then, lifting her eyes she saw Roslyn advancing to her, joy and surprise in his expression.

"Dency! What does this mean?" he said, taking her into a warm embrace, quite careless that the two domestics might be overlooking them. "What good wind has blown you here?"

Then, the danger being over—at least for a time—this poor little soul began to sob and cry, clinging piteously to him, and praying him to take her away, because by this time her absence would no doubt be known, and she dared not go back to Providence House to bear the brunt of her uncle's anger.

Roslyn stood a moment thinking deeply. He knew how averse his father was to the proposed marriage; but he also knew his goodness of heart, and felt convinced that he would neither send Dency back to her uncle, nor cast her adrift. So his decision was quickly made.

"Come into the house, sweetheart" he said, cheerfully, "and the governor shall tell us what to do."

She was past resistance now, almost fainting with fear and exertion, and suffered her lover to half lead, half carry her into the garden.

The house was small and compact, with a verandah running round it, and Captain Hurst was seated in a sunny corner contentedly smoking. But when he saw the young couple he started to his feet.

"Why! What the dickens does this mean?" he asked, sharply; and Dency clung to her lover, trembling violently.

"It means, father, that Miss Tudor has left home because of her uncle's brutality; it means, too, that we must be married without delay, or he will force her to return to what would be certain death."

"Well, I'm blest!" was the Captain's inelegant ejaculation. "You've a fine share of impudence, my son. Upon what do you propose living?"

"The allowance you will make us," coolly. "Father, you haven't the heart to send this poor girl back to certain misery."

"Hold your tongue, sir. Come here, Miss Prudence Tudor and let me look at you."

The girl obeyed, and the Captain's eyes grew suspiciously moist as he saw the traces of suffering upon the small, pretty face.

"So you think you love my lad?"

"I know I do."

"That's heartily said. Now, it stands to reason if you love him you will do nothing that would harm him. You would even release him if it were for his good?"

"I would try," tremulously, "even though it broke my heart."

The Captain kissed the wistful, sorrowful face gently.

"I don't see how Nisbet contrived to have such a niece," he said musingly. "It's very strange. Roslyn, go and order the dog-cart, and leave me to think a moment; but first get this little lady a glass of wine. Come and sit beside me, my dear. I'm a rough old fellow, but I shan't treat you roughly."

He put an arm about her waist, and drew her close in a fatherly fashion, then sat with his eyes bent down, engrossed in thought until Roslyn returned.

"Father, it won't do for Dency to remain here; Nisbet is sure to suspect us of harbouring her."

"Who ever thought of keeping her here, young jackanapes?" retorted the other, politely. "Are you to manage this affair, or am I? I warn you I shall allow no interference. Now, I've a plan, and if you agree to my conditions, we'll put it into execution at once. If I consent to this marriage, will you promise me on your part, Roslyn, to go back to Oxford at the commencement of the term; and you, my dear, solemnly declare in no way to attempt to dissuade him from keeping his word, or spoil his study?"

"But, father, in the meanwhile—I mean—what will Dency do when I go up?"

"Keep house for me, of course. Is it a bargain, my dear?"

"Oh, Captain Hurst, you are too good to us."

"Tut! tut! Nothing of the kind. Do you suppose I would help you two young fools if it were not for riling Nisbet? By the way, where is he?"

"At Scriven."

"That's lucky. Well, this is my plan. Walk together to the station and take train to Didun. Get out there and book through to London. We must throw our enemy off the scent if possible. When you reach town, go at once to Mrs. Julian. She will take you in until you can procure the license; and when you are married, take lodgings at some quiet place, and stay until you see or hear from me. Now make your preparations quickly, and in the meanwhile, I'll write my note to Mary Julian."

"Father! how can we thank you?" Roslyn cried. "I am ashamed to think how bitter I have felt towards you of late."

"I'm glad you've grace enough left for that," retorted the Captain, gruffly; but his eyes were beaming with pride in and love for this son of his. "Hurry up, you've no time to lose."

Dency glanced anxiously at him.

"Will you get into any trouble through helping us, sir?"

"Not I. Francis Hurst never yet went out of his way to help a friend. Don't be afraid, my dear; I shall come to no hurt. Why, bless you, before night I shall go down to Providence House and demand what Thomas Nisbet means by countenancing your elopement with Roslyn, and all the village will know I am as mad as a March hare. I can depend on my servants, both for secrecy and careful carrying out of my instructions;" and he began to laugh so heartily, so genuinely, that Dency could scarcely refrain from joining in his mirth.

Then Roslyn returned,—

"I am quite ready. Come, Dency. Good-bye, father."

"Good-bye, my boy," leaving a packet of notes in his hands. "Make them go as far as you can; and I'll come up to give away the bride. Good-bye, my dear! Won't you kiss me?"

Dency threw her arms impulsively about the old man's neck.

"Heaven bless you!" she said, earnestly; "and make me very grateful and good to you."

Then Roslyn drew her hand within his arm and led her away, but in the verandah she paused.

"Oh! my sister—my dear Silence!"

"Don't fret, child. I'll let her know the truth. Now hurry off before a hue-and-cry is raised."

The Captain stood watching the two figures until a bend in the road hid them from view, then he sat down soberly and sadly, because he felt now that his son was no longer his very own, that he could have but a share now in his love, his hopes and aims.

"What an ungrateful old fool I am!" he said, aloud. "I shall win another child, and unless my instinct deceives me, she is as good and true a lass as ever stepped; and yet—and yet —" and despite all his efforts, that sore feeling still remained with him.

He wondered if Dency's flight had been discovered yet, and grew anxious lest the fugitives should be intercepted at the last moment.

But no catastrophe awaited them. Roslyn procured two tickets, and the station-master looked a little surprised when he saw who was his companion, and wondered what business was taking them to Didun.

Fortune smiled on the young lovers. They had reached the busy junction long before Dency's absence was discovered.

Keziah's friend stayed some hours at Providence House, and over their tea the two women quite forgot the poor little prisoner, and chatted of old times, when both were

girls together, and Keziah had been thought "a well-looking lass."

It was quite dusk when the visitor took her leave, and the housekeeper went up to her room to find it untenanted. But she was not alarmed; doubtless the girl had seized this opportunity to join her sister in the office. So to the office Keziah went, and found Silence looking anxiously from a window.

"Where's Prudence?" demanded the woman, beginning to be vaguely apprehensive. "I do not know."

"Haven't you seen her?" peering up into the lovely, troubled face.

"Not since three."

"Where was she then? What was she doing? Speak!" shaking her vigorously.

"She was dressed for walking. More I do not know. Oh! Heaven!" breaking into a bitter cry. "She was so weary of it all; perhaps she has put an end to her misery!"

"Be quiet, fool!" Keziah said, in a terrified whisper. "Get your hat, and come with me. If the master returns before she's found he'll just about murder us!"

Mechanically Silence obeyed, and soon the two women were out in the chilly night, searching field and road, but searching vainly.

At length Keziah said,—

"The master will be home soon. We'd better go back and face it out. Perhaps we shall find Prudence there before us. She shall pay for leading me such a dance!"

But no Prudence met them on their return; and in silence and dread they awaited Thomas Nisbet's arrival.

He came at last, tired with the day's journey and business, and not too amiably disposed.

But he heard the news more calmly than they had believed possible. And, when Keziah had made an end of the story, said, addressing Silence with studied courtesy,—

"May I ask, Miss Tudor, why you allowed your sister to leave the house against my wish, my command?"

"I had no power to stay her. You do not suppose I should use physical force; and she was mad with her trouble? But I am ignorant as you are to where she went."

Looking into the clear, steady eyes, he could not doubt her truth, and asked, sharply,—

"Did either of you inquire for her at the station?"

"No; we did not think of that," Silence said, quietly. "One cannot travel without money, and she never had any."

"You're an idiot! There are ways of obtaining it. I'll go down and make inquiries."

Here a great knocking was heard at the hall-door, and when Keziah opened it she saw (greatly to her surprise) Captain Hurst standing on the topmost step, looking very fierce and aggressive.

"I want to see your master!" he said, brushing past her unceremoniously; "and I'm not going until I've said what I come to say!" and he seated himself on one of the two uncomfortable chairs the hall boasted.

Nisbet, who recognised his voice, came out at once to see him, purple with rage, hoarse with indignation that the Captain should dare board him thus in his own house.

"What do you want? I am busy, and you must call again. What do you mean by forcing your way in here?"

"Don't get excited!" said the Captain, who was fearfully so himself; "it is foolish. I want to know, Nisbet, what all this humbug means? You write me, my boy has disgraced himself by contracting an engagement with your niece!"

"The disgrace is on the other side!" yelled Nisbet; "as I told you in my letter."

"Did you? Dear me! how mistaken I have been!" remarked Hurst, with what he thought cutting satire. "Well, it seems to me you're a very Janus, man. You say one thing, and mean another. If not, why in the name of all the furies do you countenance this elopement? Yes, elopement, sir! For, from

news I have received, I find my son has gone off with your niece, and they intend marrying as soon as possible!"

"Thank Heaven!" said a soft voice, so close to the Captain that he started.

"A very nice remark, indeed!" he cried, violently, looking at the lovely, pale face of the speaker. "A very nice remark, indeed! May I ask why you are so glad at the news?"

"I thought she was dead!" Silence said, a little wildly; "and I have been half mad with my fear! Captain Hurst, be kind to her! She has suffered so long, and so much!"

Luckily for the tender-hearted old sailor, who was in danger of forgetting his part, Nisbet suddenly broke into a loud, harsh laugh.

"Going to be married, are they? And where is the interesting ceremony to take place, sir? I wish you joy of your son! He will bring you enough trouble yet; and we shall see who has most cause to complain of disgrace, you or I!"

"You're mad or drunk, Thomas Nisbet, to try to hoodwink me. You know very well where they are. Do you suppose I will consent to such a marriage? Do you think I am going to pay for this piece of folly? I tell you, no! Now do as you like!"

"Oh! Captain Hurst," Silence said, drawing nearer, "do not be hard with them!"

And, watching his opportunity, this hard-hearted old man thrust a slip of paper into her hand; then, clapping his hat upon his head, strode to the door, saying,—

"You shall suffer for this, Nisbet!" and so went out into the dark night.

CHAPTER VII.

As soon as Silence could get away unsuspected, she went to her room, and eagerly read the few words Captain Hurst had written to reassure her. Heaven only knows what comfort they carried to her aching heart.

"Dear young lady, your sister is quite safe, and I hope will be my son's wife in a few days. What I say to-night will be all a farce, so don't think more harshly of me than you can help. She is with a friend of mine, Mrs. Julian, of 12, Edinburgh-terrace, Kensington. Burn this."

She lost no time in obeying him, and comforting herself with the reflection that she could communicate with Dency, went to bed, and despite her anxiety fell asleep quite easily. Early in the morning Nisbet went down to the station and learned that Roslyn Hurst and Miss Prudence Tudor had left by the 3.45 train for Disdun, so to Disdun he went. But it was a busy place, and there being nothing in the appearance of Roslyn or Dency to excite attention, they had passed unnoticed, and he could obtain no clue as to their destination, though he cross-examined the booking-clerk severely, not to say rudely.

Had he been more civil, his search would perhaps have met with greater success, but the irritated clerk was provoked into drawing upon his imagination, and after several apparently vain efforts to assist the questioner, said, suddenly,—

"Oh! I have it! How stupid I was not to remember before. On Wednesday afternoon a young fellow answering your description did take two tickets—let me see, they were for York; but I did not see his companion. He would probably leave her at the waiting-room."

"Had he a slight scar on the left cheek?"

"I believe he had, sir," and satisfied that he had got a clue, Nisbet turned away.

He did not intend following the lovers; rather he wished the marriage to be consummated, that he might punish Roslyn and the Captain to the utmost.

"I'll employ a detective to discover them," he thought, "and afterwards watch them till the ceremony takes place, and then I'll get a warrant against that young scoundrel for

abduction and perjury. He can't make her his wife without false swearing, as she is still a minor. I wonder if old Hurst will be quite so contemptuous when his son is paying the penalty for his crime?" and he returned to Thaxter in a jubilant mood.

Believing Silence to be in total ignorance of her sister's movements he did not hesitate to discuss his plans before her, to gloat over his anticipated revenge, and, for her sister's sake, the girl schooled herself to silence.

"For surely," she thought, "in some way I shall circumvent him yet."

She had received further tidings from the Captain to the effect that he had just returned from town after having seen Roslyn and Dency united, and when the storm had blown over the bride would return to Thaxter, whilst Roslyn would go back to Oxford to finish his career there. She did not warn the old man of her uncle's plot, not wishing to give him causeless anxiety, praying daily, as she did, that Heaven would soften his hard heart.

Then a letter reached her from Dency through the Captain's agency, of course, and the writer spoke so warmly of the kindness she had met from all; her husband's love and goodness, and her own unchanged affection for Silence; of her yearning to see her once again, as please Heaven she soon would; that she was almost content. The letter contained news of Thornton, which made her heart beat faster.

"Last night Mr. Embry dined with us. He was looking very haggard and overworked, and he wished me to tell you that his poor wife died last Thursday."

Silence understood well what that message meant, and was content to wait until his coming. Not for worlds would she have wished him to show disrespect to the dead woman—rather she loved him the more for his delicacy of feeling.

It was now the thirteenth of October, and in three days Roslyn would return to Oxford, and Silence began to feel very anxious concerning the young man, having heard little lately of her uncle's plans. But on this particular night he came in greatly excited, and throwing down his hat and gloves, said, exultantly,—

"I've found 'em at last; they've never been near York, and now we'll see who is to have the best of the fight."

"Where are they?" asked Keziah, eagerly. But Nisbet shook his head as he glanced at Silence.

"I'm not going to tell you that just now; it wouldn't be wise. But we have got them all right. To-morrow I shall take out the warrant, and accompany my man to—well, to Mr. Roslyn Hurst's present residence."

Silence sat white and trembling.

"Uncle," she said, "this means death to Dency!"

He glanced contemptuously at her.

"She should have thought of that; perjury is an ugly thing, and I may as well tell you, it's of no use to persuade me to let matters rest as they are. I want revenge, and I'll have it!"

She said no more, knowing words to be worse than useless, but in her heart she had resolved what to do.

It was one of her many duties to assist in bolting doors and windows, and to-night she went about her task quietly and dry-eyed, but there was one window she did not close. It opened into a small room which was rarely used, and possessed the great merit of being only three feet from the ground.

From this she could drop into the garden and make her way to The Warren, to warn the Captain of his son's danger. The mail to London did not leave Thaxter until 11.45, and she had still two hours before her.

She went up to her room and waited in an agony of suspense until she heard her uncle retire to rest, and even then she dared not move, fearing he might be wakeful.

She heard the church clock chime the quarters, and surely no hour had ever been so

long as this she spent in the dark room listening for some sound, some sign, that Thomas Nisbet was yet on guard.

But at last she decided the moment had come for action, and stealing softly out listened at her uncle's door. He was sleeping heavily, as his sonorous snores announced.

Treading carefully she passed Keziah's room in safety, and creeping downstairs reached the place of escape. Before one could count five she was out of the window and speeding madly across the garden.

She shivered a little as she entered the plantation, it looked so dark and lonely, but conquering her fear held on her way, and soon emerged into the full glow of a newly-risen moon.

Three minutes later she was knocking at The Warren door, and a gruff voice demanded,—"Who is there?"

She answered quickly,—"Let me in, Brockett. It is I, Silence Tudor, and I must see your master at once."

Brockett needed no second urging to admit the "lovely young lady" he and Polly (the cook) so greatly admired.

"Miss Silence!" he said, opening the door to her; "what has happened?"

"Take me to Captain Hurst. Delay is dangerous, and no one knows I am here, no one must know."

Without a word he led her to the "master's snugery," where he sat with one foot swathed and resting upon a chair, and a couple of crutches beside him.

He had been dozing, and Brockett's entrance disturbed him. Without turning his head he growled out,—"Don't come near me, Brockett, or I shall murder you! For Heaven's sake, mind my foot! What in the name of Lucifer are you up to behind me?"

Then Silence went forward and stood so that he could see her.

"Jupiter!" he cried, "this beats all! Why, Miss Silence, my dear, what are you doing here at this hour? Ugh, mind my foot! It's the gout again, as you see. I'll try to keep from swearing before you, my dear; but the flesh is weak, and if I should make a slip you'll please forgive me. Sit down, and tell me the news."

"Captain Hurst, there is no time to lose. My uncle has discovered where Roslyn and Dency are, and intends taking out a warrant against your son to-morrow."

"What for? He can't arrest him without a cause!" coolly. "And there is none!"

"Pardon, but there is. Roslyn has committed perjury with regard to Dency's age, or they could not have been married. My uncle intends charging him both with abduction and perjury."

"Well, I'm —. Don't be frightened, my dear, I won't swear till you're gone, and not then if I can help it. You're a good girl, and a brave one to come over here on such an errand. Now be as wise as you are good, and tell me what to do!"

"There is only one course open to you, Captain Hurst. You must go to town and get Roslyn away before my uncle has time to act. He can't begin his journey until mid-day. If you go by the mail you will have twelve hours start."

"But I can't!" he groaned. "I can't stir from this chair without Brockett's help. Oh, dear! what is to be done? If the boy falls into Nisbet's clutches it's all up with him! Miss Tudor, for pity's sake, help me out of this fix!"

"If you cannot go I must!" she said, after a moment's hesitation. "Roslyn's arrest would mean ruin to him, and madness or death to Dency. Yes; I will go!"

"You are an angel! Brockett, get ready to accompany Miss Tudor. Brockett, where are you?"

"Here, sir; and if you'll please to give miss the instructions it will save time. I can't go in this way," with a glance at his red-and-white linen jacket.

"Don't lose a minute, but get Polly to lend you a good thick veil and shawl for Miss Tudor; she hasn't come provided with wraps," then, turning to the girl, he took her hands in his. "If Heaven had blessed me with a daughter I would have asked none fairer or better than you, my dear. Upon my word, I wouldn't mind another such a bother as this if I had only another son for your acceptance."

Silence smiled faintly.

"You are very good to say so, Captain Hurst. Now, if you please, tell me what I am to do? There must be no mistake now!"

"Well, I think Brockett had better take you straight to Embry's place. He'll help you, I know, when you explain matters. Perhaps he'll arrange some good camp of refuge for Roslyn; and I think, my dear, it would be well if you remained with Dency until your uncle and his precious spy appear. And, to avoid any further false-swearing, tell Embry he is to keep you girls in ignorance of Roslyn's hiding-place. Of course you will drop me a line to say all is safe?"

"Yes! Captain Roslyn," she stammered, in confusion; "I—I am ashamed to beg of you, but I have no money."

"Bless me! What a fool I was not to think of that! How much shall you want, my dear?"

"Enough to take me to London. Oh, no! no!" as he began to empty the contents of his purse upon her lap. "You are too generous, and I don't know when I shall be able to repay you. I will take this," and she refused to accept more than a sovereign.

Then Brockett came in, followed by Polly, who wrapped Silence in a large cloak, and fastened a thick gossamer veil over her face, and, after a hurried parting, the ill-assorted pair started for the station.

They had barely time to catch the train, and in the hurry Silence was not much noticed, and certainly not recognised, and soon they were steaming away to London with hearts full of fear and anxiety.

It was a little past three o'clock when they reached Gover-street; and Brockett, who knew London like a native, at once began to steer for "Mr. Embry's diggings," as he called his lodgings.

"I'm afraid you're awfully tired, miss; but we can't get cab or bus now, and we haven't so very far to walk."

"I am not tired now," Silence said, gently; "there will be time enough to be weary when our work is done. And Brockett, if you please, will you see Mr. Embry first, and explain everything to him? You will do it better than I could."

"To be sure I will, miss," pleased by her last words, "and here we are. All the lights out. Well, I must ring the landlady up, that's all," and he proceeded to pull the bell violently, at first, however, without any result; but presently a night-capped head appeared at a window, and a shrill voice said,—

"Go away—go away, or I'll complain to the police! What do you mean by ringing my bell at this time of night?"

To which Brockett replied respectfully,—

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, ma'am, but it's important business I'm on. I want Mr. Embry on a matter of life and death. Please to tell him it's Brockett wants to see him."

The woman said suspiciously,—

"You're not playing tricks on me, are you?"

"On my oath, ma'am, no! Make haste, if you please; I've no time to lose!"

The night-capped head disappeared, and for a little while there was silence; then a light was seen moving to and fro, and bolts were withdrawn; finally the landlady appeared.

"Who is the young woman?" she asked, peering at Silence.

"My young mistress," coolly. "Will you show her into a room whilst I see Mr. Embry?"

"He's getting up now, and you're to go to

him. This way, miss, please. Now, Mr. Brockett, you'll follow me, and the next time you make a call I hope it will be at a more Christian hour!"

"So do I, ma'am, with all my heart. I don't like to lose my beauty sleep."

CHAPTER VIII.

In a very little while Thornton came down, dressed for walking. He took steps to find a refuge for Roslyn at once, and then he and Brockett, after matters were arranged, walked smartly away till they reached a decent neighbourhood. Thornton next secured a cab, and turning to his companion, said,—

"I suppose you'll stay in town until you hear something of Nisbet's movements?"

"No, sir, I'm going back by the earliest train I can catch."

"Jump in. You'll take breakfast with me, at least?"

"No, sir, I can get a bit at the refreshment-bar; thank you all the same."

So the two men parted, and Thornton went home to wait impatiently for news from Silence. He would have liked to return to the sisters, but prudence forbade this. Should Nisbet arrive on the scene it would not do for him to find Thornton in league against him.

"I can't afford to have my movements watched by that old sleuth-hound," he thought. "It might lead to Hurst's detection."

But there was no small fear from Thomas Nisbet now. That morning he had risen, feeling dull and heavy, scarcely able to collect his faculties, and as he had never had a day's illness in his life he was very nervous. But he went downstairs intent upon his revenge, and found only Keziah in the room.

"Where is Silence?" he asked.

"Not come down yet. She is growing too fine to assist in the housework now."

"Fetch her down!" Nisbet said, in such a listless tone that Keziah stared in amazement before obeying his order.

He heard her slow, heavy step ascending the stairs, but it seemed far away; then came the opening of a door, a sharp cry of astonishment, and he went out, calling to her from the foot of the staircase,—

"What is it? Is she ill? Why don't you speak, woman?" as Keziah came towards him with uplifted hands and open mouth.

"What has happened?"

"She's gone; that's what the matter. Gone to warn her sister what you mean doing, of course. You must have been a fool to talk things over before her!"

Nisbet made no response. He stood a moment, with such hate, such rage, upon his livid face, that even Keziah was alarmed.

Then he snatched up his hat and went out quickly and heavily. He would lose no time now in taking out the warrant; they should not escape him at the eleventh hour.

And intent upon his revenge, he struck out for the village. But a strange numbness seized him, his senses seemed failing. In a sudden access of fury at his own impotence he said aloud,—

"I will go on! I will do it yet!" and took a forward step.

Then sudden darkness came over him, and with an awful inarticulate cry he fell prone to the ground, and lay senseless there, with hands tightly clenched, and awful rigid face.

As luck would have it, Polly, from The Warren, discovered him, and ran off at once for Dr. Deighton, thinking that surely "this was a judgment upon him for all his wicked ways."

A stretcher was improvised, and four men carried Thomas Nisbet back to the home which he would never again leave until he was carried from it.

Polly gave what assistance she could to Keziah, and the doctor soon arriving pronounced Nisbet's affliction to be a paralytic stroke.

"He is in a dangerous condition; perhaps he may never rally; I cannot say. I shall be able to judge better later on." Then he had taken his leave; and Keziah, quickly and unceremoniously clearing the house of all intruders, went back to her master's room, and stood looking down in an unsuspensive way upon him.

Then she turned away, and possessing herself of his keys went down to the office, and commenced a search in drawers and desk.

For a long time she was evidently unsuccessful in her quest, and gave vent to sundry exclamations of disgust. But at last her leaden eyes lit up with a fierce excitement, and a dull-red tinged her yellow cheeks as she seized a very legal-looking document.

It was the copy of Nisbet's last will and testament; and in a perfect tremor of excitement she began to read. Then her face darkened into diabolical rage. She had always expected a comfortable annuity, but now found herself mentioned thus in curt terms:

"To Keziah Staples, my housekeeper, I will and bequeath the sum of twenty pounds, free of legacy duty." All the rest of his property he left to charities—he who had never known how to practise such grace.

Keziah rose up when she had mastered these details.

"At least they'll get nothing!" she said, triumphantly; "and I've enough and to spare of my own, thanks to my prudence. But if anyone thinks I'm going to nurse him through an illness, and give my services for a paltry twenty pounds, that one will be mistaken. I can do better for myself!"

With this she quietly appropriated whatever notes and gold she found, some old and valuable jewellery, given to Nisbet as securities by some unlucky wretch; and, gloating over her treasures, went upstairs to pack her few belongings.

She was not burdened with much luggage, preferring to hoard her wages than spend them on "finery;" and without a thought of ruth for the helpless, and perhaps dying, man she went out, and walked in a leisurely way to the station.

"I want to go to Derby," she said to the one porter Thaxter boasted. "How soon do I start?"

"Why, you don't mean to say you're leaving, Keziah, and the master so ill?"

"What's that to you? Just tell me what I ask, and mind your own business!"

"You can start in an hour," snikily. "And you're going won't be no manner of loss."

So Keziah sat down and waited patiently for her train; and when Dr. Deighton returned to Providence House he was considerably startled to find his patient alone.

He drove at once to The Warren, knowing that he could rely upon Captain Hurst for assistance in any case of need.

And of course he was right. The gallant old sailor at once despatched Polly to his enemy, with strict injunctions to do as she would be done by, and then telegraphed the news to Nisbet's nieces.

As he expected, the girls arrived at Thaxter that night.

"We are in no danger now," Silence said gently; "and we owe him all duty and service."

"Fiddlesticks!" said the irate captain, but he liked the girls the better for adhering to their resolve, and himself drove them up to Providence House.

"Where is Keziah?" the voice was feeble, the words scarcely intelligible; but Dr. Deighton understood them. "She went away on the day you were stricken—after helping herself to all your available cash; then your nieces came to nurse you."

A faint, dull flush stained the hollow cheeks. "What reward do they expect?"

"None, Thomas Nisbet; they are only too well aware of your dislike to them," coolly.

"Hush! hush!" the voice belonged to Silence. "Remember he is very ill."

The jaded eyes lifted to hers were full of a vague wonder; but the man's old habit of suspicion had not left him.

"You won't get anything for your labour," he said.

"We do not wish it; all I ask is that when you are strong and well again you will not proceed against Roslyn—for his mother's sake."

Thomas Nisbet turned his face to the wall and made no answer; but at night he said to Silence,—

"That young scoundrel may come home. I shall not hurt him."

She began to thank him; but he stopped her hastily.

"Send for Turner (his solicitor); I want to alter my will."

"Wait until to-morrow, uncle; to-night you are too tired."

"How should you know that? Send for Turner, I say, and tell him to bring a couple of witnesses. I want to do everything properly; there shall be no squabbling over my hard-earned money."

And she had no peace with him until the lawyer arrived.

Then he bade Silence leave them, and for more than an hour was closeted with Turner; but after this interview he gradually sank, and the girls knew his days were numbered. They were very good and patient to him, soothing his last hours with infinite gentleness and care.

"You are not afraid of me now, Prudence," he said, one day, as she gave him his medicine.

"No uncle; only most sorry for you."

"You are like your mother. Poor Kate, poor Kate! She died young."

"Uncle," said Silence, bending over him, "Is there anything you wish to say? Anything you have to tell me?"

"No—nothing—only—only," as if ashamed of such weakness. "I've been hard to you—say you forgive me?"

They bent over him and kissed him gently, and, as if satisfied, he turned amongst his pillows and seemed to sleep; but from that sleep he would never wake on this side of the grave.

To their great surprise Silence and Dency found themselves joint-possessors of their uncle's hoard. In his last will he had distinctly stated that he wished Providence House to be sold, and Silence to reside with her sister until such time as she married.

So Captain Hurst carried them both off to The Warren, and Roslyn returned to Oxford to take his degree, which he did the following June with great honours.

Of course Dency was present to witness her boy's triumph; and when the excitement of the day had passed, and she was loitering in shady cloisters with her young husband, and the Captain fast asleep in a far corner of the lodging-house drawing-room, someone, who had been very quiet and thoughtful throughout the long hours, went to Silence and possessed himself of her hands.

"My dear, I have waited patiently. What will you say to me now?"

She lifted her shining eyes to his, and said gently, "Don't you know my answer? It is 'yes,' Thornton."

And so the long long shadows passed away, and for them the day was fair and bright.

Well, well!" said the Captain, waking suddenly, and seeing Thornton's arm about his favourite's waist, her head on his breast. "Well, well, such goings on weren't tolerated in my days; but you may come and kiss me, sly puss, if you will!"

[THE END.]

AN EGOTIST'S ADVICE.—A Frenchman divides women into two classes: Women who listen and women who do not, and when giving advice on matrimony always said, "Marry a handsome woman if you will, a rich one if you can, but in any case marry a woman who listens."

FACETIÆ.

"Has your husband gone to the meeting of the United Sons of Tell?" "He has, sir." "Was he delegated?" "If that's a high-toned word for tight, he wur."

MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF.—"Young man," he said, "why don't you give up this life of idleness and luxury and try to make a name for yourself?" "Try and make a name for myself? Why, my dear sir, my little fox-hound took the first prize at the dog show, b'Jove!"

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.—Wife: "What time did you get in last night, John?" Husband: "Two o'clock, my dear." Wife: "Where were you, John?" Husband: "At work at the office, my dear." Wife: "That's right, John; never tell a lie." (To the servant): "Mary, take Mr. Brown's shoes off the mantel-piece, and get his latch-key out of the clock and put it in his pocket."

WAITING FOR TRADE.—"James," said the undertaker, "it is about time to close the shop. Have you heard of any change in the condition of Mr. Simpson since noon?" "No, sir," replied the boy, "except that they've just turned off the doctors and called in Professor Nostrum, the all-curer." "James," rejoined his employer, shaking his head gloomily, "we will keep the shop open half-an-hour longer."

A LITTLE BOY'S REVENGE.—Arthur, who is forbidden to speak at the table, had his revenge the other day. As dinner began he was uneasy, and finally said: "Ma, can't I speak just one word?" "You know the rule, Arthur." "Not one word?" "No, Arthur, not until your father finishes the paper." Arthur subsided until the paper was finished, when he was asked what he wished to say. "Oh, nothing; only Nora put the custards outside the window to cool, and the cat has been eating them up."

A LAUGH SUDDENLY CHANGED.—A riverside restaurant-keeper, noticing that two of his customers were evidently trying to eat their suppers in the shortest possible time, lest they should miss the London boat, which was waiting at the pier, thought it would be very funny to frighten them a little. Accordingly he went into a back room and gave a remarkably perfect imitation of the steam-boat's whistle. The joke worked well; the men heard the sound and rushed for the boat, and the joker laughed long and loud, until suddenly it occurred to him that the men had gone off without paying for their suppers. Then he stopped laughing.

A WARNING FROM THE CAMERA.—A young lady went to have her picture taken. Having placed her in position, the photographer turned to arrange his camera, when, casting a last glance at the posing belle, he was horrified to see that she was holding the muzzle of a revolver to her temple! "Stop! stop!" he cried. "You surely do not mean to kill yourself! You would ruin my business; and, besides, it would be a pity to spoil that pretty face!" "Don't be alarmed," the lady laughingly replied. "My betrothed has deserted me, and I intend to send him a copy of my photograph in this position, and tell him if he does not return immediately I shall pull the trigger."

THE LAST DAY.—A family of four, including the grandfather, were coming up from the north by easy stages, and stopped over night in York. The old gentleman had reached the border line of dotage, and had to be pretty carefully watched. It happened that in the room over his some water had been spilled on the floor, and, leaking through the thin ceiling, it dripped on the old man's bed. When his daughter entered his room in the morning she found her father sitting bolt upright in bed, just under the leak, with an umbrella spread over him, and an expression of terror on his face. "Maria, Maria," he whispered, huskily, "the Last Day has come!"

SOCIETY.

THE Prince has just received a pretty and useful addition to the collection of presents which decorate the sideboards at Marlborough House and Sandringham. The officers of the three regiments of Household Cavalry are the donors, and the Silver Wedding is the *raison d'être* of the presentation. The gift, a handsome silver-gilt spirit lamp and cigar-lighter of military design, and decorated with cuirasses, helmets, kettle-drums, drumsticks, and other appropriate devices, comes a little late, but the Colonel-in-Chief of the gallant warriors will no doubt appreciate it just as well as if it had been sent when the Silver Wedding fever was at its height.

THE announcement that Miss Constance Nisbet-Hamilton, the Scottish heiress, about whom there is just the slightest tinge of romance, is engaged to be married, has caused no little stir in Northern society. Her mother, Lady Mary Bruce, the daughter of the Earl of Elgin, fell in love with Mr. Christopher, a young man of good family, and member for Lincolnshire. They were married, and on the death of the Countess of Elgin they succeeded to the estates in Haddingtonshire, covering some 16,000 acres, and 9,000 acres in the fen country, at the same time assuming—in accordance, we believe, with the express wish of the Countess, the name of Nisbet-Hamilton. The happy man, we hear, is Mr. Henry Ogilvy, an old friend and neighbour.

THE latest on dit at St. Petersburg is a report that the Czarevitch is to be betrothed to one of the sisters of the new Kaiser; indeed, that General von Pape was instructed to broach the subject to the Czar, and that the latter was so pleased with the idea that this accounts for the honours showered upon him—viz., the Ribbon of St. Andrew, the Order of St. Vladimir, and that of the Russian Imperial Family. It may be that Kaiser William II. may wish to bring about such a match, and even that Bismarck is so anxious to forward it (thus runs the tale) that this was one of the chief reasons that made him so bitterly opposed to the alliance of Princess Victoria of Prussia with a Battenberg.

THE erection of that foolish "memorial of a happy reign," the Imperial Institute, is not yet a *fait accompli*, but the contracts have been settled, and ere long a small army of carpenters and builders will be busy at work putting up the ponderous pile at South Kensington. The cost of the entire building is to be £140,000, which, strangely enough, is almost the exact sum named by the architect. Coincidences in such matters are always interesting. In addition to this contract, there will be another of £10,000 for ventilating and electric lighting, and the cost of the large tower, which is put down at from £11,000 to £12,000. This, of course, is only the beginning, for with the completion of the building will come the furnishing and fitting, and a whole host of similar things, all more or less expensive. It will also cost a nice sum, too, to provide for the Kensington gang.

GREAT excitement prevails among the girls in garrison towns in consequence of the general order from the Commander-in-Chief intimating that in future Tommy Atkins will not be allowed to marry unless he has seven years' service, two good conduct badges, and can stump up £5 to show that he has sufficient to pay the ordinary expenses and start house-keeping. The poor recruit's heart must throb violently for seven long years before he can think of matrimony, and even then he must possess the necessary qualifications. He will not be able, as heretofore, to go a-wooing, as cautious girls will not listen to his loving declarations, unless backed up by a certificate of seven years' service, the necessary badges, and a bank-book. Still, there is one royal road. There is no specified term of service for sergeants, so those in love must go in for promotion at the same time.

STATISTICS.

LIFE AND DEATH.—The deaths from some or other kind of violence in 1886 numbered 17,441, being 626 to a million persons living, a proportion almost identical with that recorded in the previous year. The deaths from suicide, however, which numbered 2,254, 1,694 being of males and 560 of females, were more numerous in proportion to the population—80 per million—than in any earlier year, with the exception of 1879, when the rate was also 80 per million. On the other hand, the deaths ascribed to accident, 14,860 in number, were fewer in proportion to the population than on any previous occasion. In 1865 the accidental deaths were 735 per million living, but from that date the ratio has fallen almost uninterruptedly, until in 1886 it reached 534. The fall in the mortality from homicide, which includes all cases in which a coroner's jury has returned a verdict of murder or of manslaughter, has been even more striking, for in 1866 the ratio of these deaths was 23 to a million living; but it has fallen gradually until in 1885 and 1886 it reached its present minimum of 11 per million, so that the rate fell 50 per cent. in the course of twenty years. Of these deaths from homicide, 311 in number, 171 were cases of murder, and 140 were cases of manslaughter. Nearly half the murders, 81 out of the 171, were cases of infanticide, that is murders of children in the first year, and generally the first month, of life; and more than 10 per cent. of the deaths ascribed to manslaughter were also deaths of infants. Comparative tables of the death-rates from homicide between the years 1858 and 1886 show that in infancy and childhood, to the end, that is, of the tenth year of life, there is practically no difference in the liability of the two sexes to death from homicide; but that after this throughout life males are very much more liable than females, as might be anticipated. In each sex the liability is far highest in infancy, and lowest in childhood, increasing after this to the 35-45 years period, and then slightly and gradually declining.

GEMS.

WEALTH is not always fortune. The symptoms of the inviable are the love-liest of what is visible. JUDGE no one by his relations, whatever criticisms you pass upon his companions. ADVERSITY is the trial of principle; without it, a man hardly knows whether he is honest or not. BEAR in mind that you are largely responsible for your children's inherited characters, and be patient with them.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED BERRY PUDDING.—One pint of bread crumbs soaked in one pint of sweet milk, three beaten eggs, one and one-half cups of sifted flour, one-fourth of a teaspoonful of salt; roll out and spread with one pint of berries; roll up and boil in a pudding bag one and one-half hours.

POUND CAKES.—Put one pound of butter into an earthen pan with a pound of powdered sugar and a little grated nutmeg, beat them well together with the hand until forming a smooth, light cream, when add by degrees eight eggs, beating it ten minutes, add one and one-fourth pounds sifted flour, stir it in lightly, and put the mixture in heaps to bake.

POTATOES A LA LYONNAISE.—These are much simpler than the name implies. Rub a lump of good butter over the inside of a clean, smooth, slightly-warmed skillet, turn in some cold boiled potatoes cut up, add pepper, salt, a little chopped parsley, and perhaps the least bit of onion very fine. Shake from time to time, and see that they do not brown.

MISCELLANEOUS.

BEAUTY is not confined to youthfulness, neither is it the exclusive monopoly of those who are upon the other side of middle age. There is a slow but steadily growing beauty which can come to maturity only in old age. It is the fruit of noble hopes and purposes; it is the result of having something to do, something to live for, something worthy of humanity.

HE who wants to enjoy the comforts of religion as derived through the medium of the Bible, must cheerfully and thoroughly submit himself to the absolute, divine authority of that book. If he doubts its authority, or cavils with it, he will not be in a condition of mind to receive its comforts. Faith, simple faith, is an indispensable condition on his part.

DIAMOND cutting and polishing is recommended by a well-known jeweller as an employment for women. He says: "I believe that a woman or girl with a good education and quick intelligence, who took an interest in her work, would be able to polish a diamond very fairly in six months. The qualities necessary in this art are great honesty, good education, quick intelligence, great patience, and good eyesight."

OLD men crones are among the most interesting studies in life; young men have no particular depth of friendship about them as a rule. If they quarrel, there's an end, and probably they will never come together again. They don't quarrel always; they let one another go and have no more interest. Old people are different. When they quarrel they have a lively old quarrel. They abuse one another, and are very rabid for a while. Then they meet accidentally, and in a minute they are just as they were. They have forgotten their fight, what it was about, and the only danger in any allusion to it is that each apologizes to the other so strongly that it ends in another quarrel.

A FOOD AND MEDICINE.—Eggs serve as food and medicine both. The white is the most efficacious of remedies for burns, and the oil extracted from the yolk is regarded by the Russians as an almost miraculous salve for cuts, bruises and scratches. A raw egg, if swallowed in time, will effectually detach a fishbone fastened in the throat, and the white of two eggs will render the deadly corrosive sublimate as harmless as a dose of calomel. They strengthen the consumptive, invigorate the feeble, and render the most susceptible all but proof against jaundice in its most malignant phase. The merits of eggs do not even end here. In France alone the wine clarifiers use more than eighty millions a year, and the Alsatians consume fully thirty-eight millions in calico printing, and for dressing the leather used in making the finest French kid gloves. Even egg shells are valuable, for allopath and homoeopath alike agree in regarding them as the purest form of the carbonate of lime.

DIET THAT GIVES STRENGTH.—Pugilists, pedestrians, and others who perform in public feats requiring great strength and endurance undergo beforehand severe training to develop their powers to the utmost. The rules laid down by their trainers are very strict and rigidly enforced. The following are a few with regard to diet. Little salt. No coarse vegetables. No pork or veal. Two meals a day—breakfast at eight and dinner at two. If supper is allowed at all, it must be a very light and simple one several hours before bedtime, and is not recommended. It is reckoned much against a man's wind to go to bed with a full stomach. No fat meat is ever given, and no butter and cheese, which are considered indigestible. Pies and pastry are not allowed. Meat must always be taken fresh and not seasoned. Salt meats are not allowed. Puddings and hard dumplings are considered unfit to be eaten. The trainers say, "People may as well take earthenware into their stomachs."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

K. E. C.—The horseshoe is supposed to indicate good luck.

F. B.—The white rose means purity, the red rose passionate love.

QUEENIE.—The stamp flirtation was given in No. 1023 post free, three halfpence.

WEeping WILLOW.—1. There are no particular sets. 2. Not sufficiently formed.

FLORENCE.—We regret we can only recommend you to apply to the Spanish Consul-General.

R.—Study the advertisements in the scholastic papers. We cannot recommend any professional man.

FRED'S DARLING.—1. Yes. 2. Probably you would be thought good-looking if the expression is good. 3. Yes.

HARRY'S DARLING.—The engagement ring should be worn on the third finger of the right hand. 2. Decidedly too young. 3. Yes.

YOUNG MAN'S SLAVE.—1. Not at all. 2. It is not usually worn on that finger, but the third of the right hand. 3. Very neat.

REMY.—Yes, if they are mutually attached and his intentions are honourable. 2. Oatmeal should be put in the water and used like soap. 3. Moderate.

ST. MAUR.—1. Lemons are beneficial to health if taken in moderation. 2. You had better inquire at New-street station. 3. We really cannot inform you. 4. Passable.

A. V.—Wait till the young lady has time to get over her indignation. Meanwhile, talk the matter over with her brother, and enlist him as your ally in the work of reconciliation.

J. M.—If the letter be very brief, commence sufficiently far from the top of the page to give nearly equal amount of blank paper at the bottom of the sheet when the letter is ended.

S. N.—As a rule it is the lady's place to bow first under the circumstances which you mention; but if the parties were old and warm friends they would not stand on the technicalities of etiquette.

L. F. F.—A dropsical affection is one of the most frequent results of scarlet fever. It is believed that this would seldom occur, if the warm bath were daily used as soon as the skin gave signs of peeling off.

L. B.—In conferring a favour, avoid conveying the impression that the recipient is greatly under obligations to you. Rather imply that the granting and accepting of the favour is mutually a pleasure.

N. T.—If you have the means to pay your way it would be well for you to enter some good private school at once. The teacher could tell you what to do after you have been fitted for college under his instruction.

W. M.—Albumen, which is found in great abundance in the human body, is the raw material out of which the flesh and other tissues are made. The white of an egg, which is merely pure albumen, is a good specimen of it.

F. F.—To make potato pancakes, make a batter with one cup of flour, two teaspoonfuls of sugar, two teaspoonfuls of salt, a teaspoonful of baking powder, and two cups of milk; adding, last, three eggs, beaten light. Slice the tomatoes, the larger the better, season, cover with the batter, and bake on a griddle.

W. M.—To make lemon jelly, soak half a box of gelatine in a cup and a half of warm water. When the gelatine is dissolved, add a cup of sugar, the juice of three lemons, and a cup and a half of boiling water. Add two whites of an egg, beaten light, and let come to a boil; strain into a mould, and set away to cool.

G. G. M.—William Hogarth, the great pictorial satirist, was born in London, November 10, 1697. He died on October 26, 1764. He retained his wonderful powers to the last. His life was written by G. A. Sala (London) in 1867. His first notable effort was a humorous illustration of a pothouse brawl of which he was a witness. He was apprenticed to a silversmith, and his education was scanty.

C. M. K.—The tame swans kept in parks and public gardens are descended from the wild swan, but differ from them a little. The young are always white instead of bluish-grey. The finest tame swans are said to be those called Polish swans, which are brought from Germany. In old times, in England, the flesh of the swan was served on the tables of nobles; but it is dry and has little flavour.

F. B. S.—It is quite clear that your former lover has grown tired of you, whether he is in love with any one else or not. Your only sensible course is to fill up your time, and occupy your mind with work, study, reading, music and especially with the society of friends of both sexes. This will enable you to be happy without your fickle lover, and is not merely the best way to win him back, but is also the best way to something better, that is, to find some one more worthy to fill his place.

J. B. J.—No; nothing is positively known on the subject. It is not even known who the original inhabitants were. Every year new discoveries are made which only serve to increase the uncertainty on the subject. Do useful utensils and weapons of war and the chase are dug up which show that some now unknown races once inhabited America. Sculptures are also unearthed, and remains discovered, that indicate a singular degree of advancement in various arts on the part of people who once inhabited the Continent of America and the adjacent islands.

R. L.—The population of Oregon, U.S., in 1885 was 194,150; in 1880, 174,768.

LALAGE.—Lalage was a young female beloved by Horace. Also a slave of Cynthia's.

C. C.—A minor can doubtless obtain a license to sell cigars, but he cannot be held liable for any debts he may contract.

D. W.—The initials of both parties, with the date of the engagement, are often engraved on the inside of the engagement ring.

W. H.—Mountain-dew is genuine Scotch Highland whisky; so called because often secretly distilled in the mountains of Scotland.

M. A.—A gentleman who may be smoking when he meets a lady, should in bowing remove the cigar from his mouth, and from her presence.

X. N.—Kate was originally the nickname or abbreviated form of Catherine. It has, however, come to be used as a name of itself, and means purity.

L. B. B.—Stains of fruit, walnuts, ink, &c., may be removed by immersing the hands in vinegar and water, or by rubbing them with a piece of pumice-stone.

W. V.—It was very rude of him to pass you in that way. Treat him with silent contempt. If he cares for you he will soon apologise; if not he is not worth troubling about.

D. V. W.—The colour shown on steel in tempering is not due to any chemical change or mechanical condition of the structure directly, but is owing to superficial change in the mechanical condition of the surface, set up by the strains of heating and cooling.

TAKE IT EASY.

Take it easy, men of muscle!
Take it easy, men of brain!
You may stumble if you hurry,
And you nothing then will gain.
Any work that worth the doing
Surely is worth doing well;
Rather then by haste destroy it,
Better stop and breathe a spell.

Take it easy, faithful maidens!
Take it easy, girls and boys!
Every pleasure rashly followed,
In the end too surely cloy.
Never haste to grasp the shadow
When the substance is secure!
Trust me, there is health and safety
In the motto, "Slow and sure."

Take it easy, slave of passion!
Hasty words will nothing gain;
While your breast is filled with anger,
All your work will be in vain.
Curb your temper till cool reason
Has a chance to play its part,
And your task will be the easier,
And the purer be your heart.

Take it easy, mourning pilgrim!
Sad at heart and sick at soul,
Why abridge? Now, when Heaven is certain,
Be so swift to reach the goal!
Wait God's time, and thy probation
On the earth will soon be o'er,
And thou'lt wrestle with temptation
And heart-sorrow nevermore.

F. S. S.

O. L. H.—Oysters are reported to be good for dyspepsia. They never produce indigestion, and are preferred by invalids when all other food disagrees with them. Raw oysters are used by singers for hoarseness.

P. N.—For a waterproof varnish for paper try one part dammar resin and six parts acetone digested in a closed flask for two weeks, and the clear solution poured off. To this four parts of collodion are added, and the whole is allowed to clear by standing.

W. C. C.—1. Not unless it contains libellous matter. 2. Consult a physician. 3. Wallflower means fidelity in misfortune, and ivy fidelity, so you may draw your own conclusions. 4. Keep them covered, put them as little in water as possible, and when you wash them use oatmeal instead of soap.

L. L.—Some men are so selfish when they are in love that it is almost impossible for them to forego their own wishes, even in the most trifling matters. Your lover seems to be one of that kind. If he is, all you can do is to let him have his own way. Perhaps, after a while, he will get tired of it, if you do not oppose him.

M. M.—1. Point d'Alençon is merely the old-fashioned herring-bone stitch, with a twist after it, formed by passing the needle under the thread of the last stitch before making another. It is used to connect lines of Point de Venise or Point de Bruxelles, or sometimes to join the edges of braid. 2. Scrap-bags are made in every style and of every kind of material.

F. F.—Unless you are engaged in the business of managing shooting galleries, we do not think your invention would be likely to ever return to you the money required to take out a patent except by expending much time, labour and more money. Besides the fees to the patent office, you would have to pay a patent agent to show you how to draw up your claims in such a way as to really protect your invention if it should prove valuable; and when you had your invention patented, your only possible purchasers would be among a class that is neither large nor rich.

H. H.—We advise you to persevere in your endeavours to get a situation in the department of labour to which you are most inclined.

M. H.—You cannot obtain a divorce on the grounds named, but if you can prove your statements as to the cruelty you can obtain a judicial separation.

C. M.—1. The steamship *Great Eastern* is 680 feet long, 83 feet wide, 38 feet deep, 28 feet draught, and of 24,000 tons measurement. 2. Rare coins are often disposed of by auction.

H. W. N.—It would not be at all difficult to learn, but lessons would have to be taken from a master. The instrument could be obtained by application to any wholesale dealer.

N. M. C.—1. The carte is that of a pleasant, attractive looking girl who writes a capital hand. 2. The meaning of the letter is simply that it is the number of the sheet of the book.

F. R. N.—You must wait till the gentleman makes further sign himself. As he has gone to live so far away without taking any notice it does not look as if he were deeply impressed.

C. W.—Your woman's wit should surely devise a means of bringing your shy lover's courage to the "sticking point." Try a little judicious coyness. 2. Very good writing.

R. B.—All you can do is to speak frankly on the subject with your betrothed, and abide by the result. If he leaves your sister better than he loves you, it would be an act of folly for you to marry him.

A. O. D.—Incipient catarrh is sometimes cured by snuffing up the nose occasionally a little table salt. Also by gargling the throat night and morning with a tolerably strong solution of table-salt and water.

S. F. H.—The lines are neat and express your sentiments fully, but the metre is too faulty for publication. "Fred" ought to feel highly flattered, if he saw them, but are you not forsaking the real for the ideal?

H. H. R.—Several derivations are given of the name "Old Tom," applied to gin, and one of the most probable is that it was taken from the Christian name of a gentleman connected with a large house of London distillers.

K. W.—1. We can see no impropriety in the matter, especially under the circumstances mentioned; but you must use your own judgment. 2. Consult your sister on the subject. A great deal depends upon the intimacy of the parties.

W. W. H.—1. No, not if you are particular in your diet, eschewing all very rich, salt or greasy food. 2. Glycerine diluted with borax water will help to remove blackheads. 3. Your penmanship will answer admirably for an entry clerk.

M. N.—It is an old question in philosophy whether a man is compelled to suit himself to circumstances, or whether he can bend circumstances to his will. It is one not readily to be decided, and much depends on the individual case under discussion.

D. D.—Iodoform ointment is the most effective salve to remove the pain and heal obstinate burns, but such extensive and deep burns as yours may gangrene, with very serious results, and should have medical treatment. Try all the other hospitals and dispensaries in your town, to see whether you cannot find a doctor conscientious enough to make a thorough examination before prescribing.

R. A.—When nervous wakefulness ensues at night-time, when there is a desire to sleep, but, on account of a peculiar state of mind and body, rest will not come, inhalation of pure air is a safe and efficient soporific. It is observed in these conditions that a person only breathes half-way, and that the oxygen in the lungs is kept exhausted. A physician recommends a few full respirations as the best remedy for this kind of wakefulness, which is produced frequently by the condition of the atmosphere as well as state of the mind.

N. W.—All varieties of white goods will be popular, such as Henrietta cloth, combined with lace, embroidery, or soft silk; white cashmere, with surah, faille, or lace; cream-white clarette, trimmed with Canton crepe or lace; and the ever popular albatross, convent cloth, nuns' velveting, and feather cloth. All dresses hang in straight lines, caught up deftly on the hips, to relieve the long fall in front, while they are also straight behind, the tiny remnant of the bustle holding the draperies out a little, and then letting them droop, without looping, to the hem of the gown. Most bodices are made with a waistcoat or plastron, and few are plain.

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